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# NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG U.S. PAT. OFF.

## THE DEAD LETTER

The detective climbed up to the window, and, looking in, discovered the man on his knees. He was uncovering a hole in the floor from which he was lifting some object.

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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# THE DEAD LETTER;

## OR,

## NICK CARTER'S POSTAL CLUE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS CRIME.

"When a letter, having been mailed to a person who does not receive it, contains nothing which will enable the postal authorities to return it to the writer, it goes to the dead-letter office at Washington, and is there, ultimately, destroyed," said Nick Carter.

The gentleman who was seated opposite him in the parlor of a suite of rooms in a prominent hotel, at Washington, nodded.

"I understand perfectly," he replied. "That is why I am here, Mr. Carter. When I discovered that you had come to Washington I lost no time in following you, for it occurred to me that if we were in time, the dead-letter office might yield something that it would be worth an effort to obtain."

"If we are in time," said the detective.

"It is only three weeks, Carter, since the letter was mailed. It could hardly have reached the point of destruction yet. I am not familiar with the rule that obtains in that office, but——"

"Oh, we are in time. The letter would scarcely have been sent here yet. I am not posted concerning the rules of that department, myself, but my impression is that there is a thirty-day rule in regard to it. Suppose we leave the matter of the letter, for the present, and you tell me about the crime itself."

"The crime is an unusual one, Carter, to say the least. In the locality where it was committed it is not generally known that it was a crime. But I—and others who are more or less intimate with the family and familiar with the circumstances—know that Lucile Allerton was murdered."

"Do you mean to say that there was, or is, any doubt about it, officially?" asked the detective, with a raising of his eyebrows.

"No, not that. The family knows the truth. The doctors know it. The coroner knows all about it, and so do the police; but the family have managed to keep it from the newspapers, so that the facts haven't become public property; that is all."

"I see."

"As I announced to you as soon as you received

me, I am only the family lawyer. I inherited the care of the affairs of James Thornton, First, from my father; I was the trusted manager of all the affairs of James Thornton, Second, as long as he lived, and since James Thornton, Third, became the head of the family I have continued in that capacity."

"And he, if I understand you correctly, is the only male member of the family now alive," said the detective.

"That is correct."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-seven."

"And Lucile Allerton was killed while a guest at the Thornton home—but I won't anticipate what you are about to tell me. I prefer to hear your version of the case first. Of course, I have read all that the papers have had to say about it during the last four or five days, and, I suppose, like others who have read those accounts, I had not thought of a crime in connection with it."

"Naturally you have not," replied the lawyer. "Every effort was made to impress the public with the idea that Miss Allerton's death was the result of an accident. It was not a difficult matter to give that impression. The police and other authorities of the neighborhood were quite willing that it should be done, believing that a better opportunity to catch the murderer would be thus afforded."

"Were you at the house at the time this thing happened?" the detective asked.

"Yes. I was there that night."

"So, I am to understand that the information you are to give me is first-hand? It is not a rehash of things that have been told to you."

"Not at all. In fact, much that I have to tell you I have deemed it best to keep from the local authorities of that place. Thornton Arms, as the place is called, is just outside the jurisdiction of Greater New York, as you are doubtless aware."

"No; I was not aware of it. If I had been asked the question I should have said that Thornton Arms—I know the place quite well—is within the limits of the city."

"Nevertheless, it is not."

"Well?"

"Just how shall I tell you the story?"

"My dear sir, there is only one way to tell a story such as you are about to relate, and that is to tell all you know, clearly, concisely, and unreservedly. There are three classes of professional men with whom all mankind has to do, sooner or later, and from none of the three should anything be kept if his best services are desired. When you engage a doctor, tell him all the truth; when you engage a lawyer, tell him all the truth; when you engage a detective, tell him not only all the truth, but enlighten him regarding the opinions you have formed in regard to each part of your tale. Now, go ahead."

"Very well. But please remember that I am a plain, methodical lawyer. I shall try to make my statements clear and concise, and I shall avoid all embellishments."

The detective nodded. "That is as I would wish," he said.

"James Thornton and Miss Lucile Allerton became betrothed six weeks ago—the twenty-first day of April, to be exact. The wedding day had been set for the twenty-first day of October—six months to a day after the betrothal. The pair were well mated in every way. The two estates adjoin each other. James Thornton has inherited a fortune of several millions from his father and grandfather, and Miss Allerton's holdings were rather more than half as great as his. The entire Allerton estates, left to the sisters——"

"Wait a moment. There is a Miss Allerton still living?"

"Yes. She comes into the entire fortune now—or will within the year, when she arrives at her twenty-third birthday."

"Is she older or younger than the young woman who was killed?"

"Neither. They were twins; but as unlike as possible. Lucile was dark, of the Spanish-beauty type, like her mother, who has long been dead. Sybil is as blonde as a Norwegian belle, resembling her father, who died six years ago. She is very beautiful, as was Lucile. Perhaps I should mention that in my professional capacity I have the management of their affairs, also."

"Thank you. Please go on."

"I was about to say that the entire Allerton estate, which will now fall to Sybil, is rather greater than Thornton's."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Harler, I will ask you to cut that part of it out, for the present. We can get down to all that later on, if it seems necessary to do so. Tell me about the crime first."

"There was a house party at Thornton Arms, and additional guests had been asked for the week-end. There were perhaps thirty guests at the Arms. Saturday afternoon there were golf and tennis, and Lu-

cile played at golf till dark. That evening, after dinner, a light rain began to fall, and the company, forced to remain indoors, indulged in impromptu charades. By eleven o'clock the guests began to disappear to their rooms. By half-past eleven there were only three or four of them left downstairs. At eleven-forty-five—I know what the exact time was because Lucile asked about it and I looked at my watch to tell her—she, Lucile, bade us good night and went to her rooms. That was the last time she was seen alive."

"Well?"

"She was an early riser, notwithstanding her youth, and no matter at what hour she retired, she always appeared promptly at the breakfast table; but on the morning which followed she did not come down."

"I suppose somebody was sent after her, then, eh?"

"No attention was paid to her absence until nearly ten o'clock, when Thornton appeared. He asked for her at once, and, on being told that she had not been down, sent one of the maids to 'rouse her out,' as he expressed it.

"The maid returned at once, with a white, scared face, and said that she could not rouse Miss Allerton, and that all three doors, by any of which she might have gained access to the rooms, were fastened on the inside.

"I need not describe to you, Mr. Carter, how we pounded at those doors until we were convinced that something had happened to Lucile. We thought of breaking down one of the doors, then, but some one—I think it was Thornton—suggested a ladder, and the windows. I was the first one to climb the ladder when it was put in place beside one of the windows."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes. The lower sash had been raised to the full extent. One of the lace curtains was hanging outside, blown there by the wind. When I raised my head above the sill of the window Lucile's silence was no longer a mystery."

"You saw her, then?"

"Yes."

"Right here, Mr. Harler, I would like you to be particular in describing each detail of what you discovered in that first view of the scene, as you looked in at the window, and before you entered the room. I want to know just what your first impressions were of that scene, no matter how absurd they may appear to you now. Can you take your mind back to the moment when you looked in at that window, and tell me about it?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Then do it."

"I climbed the ladder rather slowly. Without cause, other than our failure to rouse Lucile, I think I anticipated something in the nature of what I did find?"

"Do you mean—murder?"

"Yes, frankly, I do."

"Go on; I will ask you about that later. You climbed the ladder—well?"

"I saw the dead body of Lucile lying upon the floor. I could see that there was some sort of a wound on her head, just above the right temple. There was blood—not much, however—around it, and there were a few stains on the rug. She was lying partly upon her left side, with her left arm bent beneath her body, as if she had not had time to raise it, or to reach out with it when she fell. There was no weapon or missile of any kind near her. Her right arm was stretched straight out at a right angle from the position of her body, and the tips of the first, second, and third fingers of that hand were stained, just a little, with blood. That is what I saw when I looked in at the window."

## CHAPTER II.

### THINGS THE LAWYER DISCOVERED.

"Now," said the detective, raising one hand to interrupt the lawyer when he would have continued, "what were your impressions at that moment before you climbed in at the window? Do you recall them?"

"Distinctly."

"Tell me what they were."

"The first one, the most pronounced one, was murder, of course."

"Naturally; but did it not occur to you that she might have fallen, and so have struck her head against something, thus causing an injury which resulted in death? Didn't that occur to you?"

"Later it did, but not at that moment."

"Notwithstanding the fact that you did, at that moment, notice the absence of any weapon near her or in the room?"

"Notwithstanding that; yes."

"What was it that gave to you that instant impression of murder, Mr. Harler?"

"I think it was the combination of circumstances. I could not attribute it to any one circumstance."

"I understand you."

"I have neglected to say that Lucile was dressed, just as she had been when I had last seen her and

bidden her good night in the drawing room. Not one of her ornaments had been removed. A handkerchief that she had carried during the evening was on the floor, near the middle of it. I noticed that, too. I am something of a connoisseur in laces, and I remembered the handkerchief perfectly."

"Well?"

"There was the open window, with one of the curtains hanging from it; there were the electric lights in the room still burning—and there was the impression of which I had been conscious when I was climbing the ladder, and before I looked in at the window."

"The impression that a crime had been committed?"

"Yes."

"How do you account for that impression at that time?"

"I don't account for it. It was there; that is all."

"But the facts that the lights were still burning; that Lucile was dressed just as when you saw her last; that the handkerchief she had carried in the drawing room was on the floor near the body; the absence of a weapon of any kind and the bloodstains on the tips of the fingers of her right hand should have borne out the idea that she had fallen and struck her head soon after entering the room."

"I know; but they did not. I had no thought of such an idea then."

"If you received the impression of a murder, as you say, what more came with it? Did you also leap at a conclusion as to how it had been done, and did the name of any person who might have committed the crime occur to you?"

"No. I didn't go so far as that."

"Before we go any farther, you know of no reason why she should have been made the victim of such a crime, do you?"

"No. Lucile Allerton least of all the persons I have known, or know now."

"There was no name that came into your mind while you still stood upon the ladder looking in at the window? No name of any person among that party at the house, or not one of that party?"

"No."

"No face rose before you? No memory of any incident in the life of that young woman?"

"Well, I can't deny that quite so emphatically; but that is getting very far ahead of my tale, as I wished to tell it to you. Besides, I don't believe that it could have even the slightest connection with this affair."

"Very well. Go on. We will refer to that again, later."

"I have said that when I climbed the ladder I ascended far enough so that my head was raised above the sill of the window."

"Yes."

"I stopped there. Already I could feel the shaking of the ladder, and knew, therefore, that some person was following me up it. I surmised that it must be James—Mr. Thornton—and I half turned, telling him rather sharply to go back."

"Did he do so?"

"No. He refused. He even struggled to get past me, but I held him where he was, and finally succeeded in forcing him back down the ladder to the ground, although I was obliged to return nearly all the way to the ground in order to do so. My own white face must have told the others something of the scene I had witnessed, and nearly everybody was there, at the foot of the ladder, by that time."

"You told them what you had seen?"

"There was absolutely no use in an attempt to deny it, or soften it. Yes, I told them; and then I insisted upon returning to the room alone. I directed them to go around to the stairs, and told them that I would open the doors and admit them to the room, and I finally persuaded them that it would be much the better way to do as I asked. I called to the groom who had brought the ladder to the window and ordered him to take it away again, after I had entered at the window, and then I made my way into the room."

"I hope you had the forethought to examine the sill of the window before you crossed it, Mr. Harler."

"I did. I examined it most thoroughly. I found just one stain there, of yellow clay—perhaps you do not know that yellow clay abounds in that neighborhood—which might have been there an hour, or a day, or a week."

"Anything else?"

"No. Not there."

"But inside the room?"

"I am coming to all that, Mr. Carter."

"Well?"

"I examined the sill inside the room as well. On the under side of it I discovered two slight scars, punctures they were, twelve and a half inches apart. They might have been made with a brad awl—or with the points of two hooks, as they doubtless were."

"Am I to understand that you are suggesting the use of a rope ladder, or of something of the sort, fastened there to gain access to the room?" asked the detective.

"Yes. I am trying to give you the benefit of my

search in that room before I admitted any other person to it. You may believe that it was not long before they were clamoring at the door for admittance; but I called to them to wait; that I was not ready to have them enter. You see, my position in that household is well assured. In many ways they look up to me as if I were the actual head of the family."

"I can understand that, Mr. Harler."

"It was James who insisted the loudest upon being admitted, but I managed to quiet him. I think it was ten minutes after I climbed in at the window before I opened the door."

"Now, try to tell me in as few words as possible, all that you discovered there," said the detective.

"Will you make a list of the things, as I mention them?"

"No; I will do better than that; I will remember them."

"Very well, sir. I have numbered them in the order in which I discovered them, and I have made a list of them. I will provide you with one if you should need it."

"All right."

"First: The position of the body, which I have already described. I wish to add to that the fact that the left arm was doubled under the body in such a manner that the wrist had been broken; but that was not discovered until later—after the others had been allowed to enter the room."

"How about the wound itself?"

"I am coming to that; it is second on my list, for, really, I examined that the first thing I did."

"I should suppose you would do that," said the detective.

"Second: The wound. If a cube were cut down to a point, from each of the four sides, so that it formed a four-sided wedge, or, in other words, a pyramid, and if such an instrument as I describe were used as a weapon, it would make exactly the sort of wound that was inflicted upon the head of Miss Lucile Allerton. The skull was fractured—or pierced, rather—in just that manner. The indentation is between half an inch and an inch in depth. Blood had flown from it, but not a great amount of it."

"Have you an idea what the instrument was with which she was killed?" asked Nick.

"No; not at all; only I feel quite sure that it was of metal; also that there was nothing in that room, or in any of the rooms adjoining it, which would have made such a wound as that was. Still, you may differ with me as to that when I have finished."

"Go on, then."

"Third: There were bloodstains on the tips of the first, second, and third fingers of her right hand, which was extended to arm's length at a right angle with the body. The very natural presumption concerning those stains is that Lucile raised her right hand to her head when she received the blow, when she was actually falling down from the effect of it—and yet, she fell so quickly that her left arm was doubled under her so that the wrist was broken.

"Fourth: The body was lying at full length on the floor between a table, which occupies the centre of the room, and a dresser, which stands between the windows, against the wall, for the room was the dressing room of her suite of three rooms at the Arms. The head was toward the dresser and about eighteen or nineteen inches away from it, near the right-hand corner as one would face it. That right-hand corner is very sharp, and it was smeared with blood that had dried. The material of which the dresser is made is ebony—a wood that is as hard as iron when properly seasoned.

"Fifth: I have said that the body was dressed precisely as when I bade Lucile good night, but that was my judgment from the view I obtained from the ladder, outside the window. When I entered the room I discovered that there had been one change. Lucile had worn slippers all the evening; of that I am certain, because I noticed them. After I entered the room I discovered that a pair of shoes had replaced the slippers."

"What's that?" said Nick. "Do you mean that she had changed her slippers for shoes after she bade you good night and went to her room?"

"So it would seem; yes."

"But that would suggest that she had been outside the house—or intended to go out."

"She had been outside I think, although I am not sure. I was about to demonstrate my reason for that belief in the sixth count of my summing-up."

"I see. Well, go on."

"Sixth: Tan shoes of medium weight were on her feet. They were stained by recent contact with wet grass and gravel, and there were bits of yellow clay clinging to the heels and soles, and also under the arch of the instep."

"You made quite a thorough examination, Mr. Harler," said the detective.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE LAWYER'S THEORY.

"Seventh," continued the lawyer, apparently not heeding the interjection made by the detective, "the skirt of the gown worn by Lucile, and the petticoat under it, were damp around the bottom when I examined the body; there were also two marks of the yellow clay on the petticoat—and I should say right here, Mr. Carter, that I did a thing of which you may not approve, when I made the discoveries just described."

"What was that?"

"I wiped away the stains of soil that were on the petticoat, dress, and shoes. I did it carefully and thoroughly, using my own handkerchief for the purpose."

"Why did you do that?" he asked, speaking gently but incisively.

"Mr. Carter, my first care to any person of the name of Allerton or Thornton is, has been, and must continue to be, regard for the good repute of those names. There was no doubt left in my mind that Lucile had been abroad that night, in the grounds that surround Thornton Arms, and that she had gone out of the house and returned to it by means of a rope ladder."

The detective nodded.

"Now," continued the lawyer, "either that rope ladder was concealed somewhere inside Lucile's rooms, ready for use, or the end of it was thrown to her from without. The indentations beneath the sill of the window spell rope ladder, do they not?"

"Yes; or something of that sort."

"Most certainly now, while her reasons for leaving the house in that surreptitious manner might have been readily explained, if she were alive to make such an explanation, the fact remained that she was dead, and could not explain. I deemed it my duty to withhold the fact that she had gone out, and determined at that moment to reveal it to no person other than yourself."

"To no person other than me?" asked the detective, in surprise.

"Yes; I will admit to you that even at that moment I thought of your name as being that of the only person in whom I felt that I could implicitly trust to handle this case."

"Well, what else?"

"I searched everywhere in the room that I could search, in the time allotted to me, to find the rope ladder, or a trace of it. I could not discover it. I have made a more thorough search since then, and it has not been found."

"And your conclusions from that fact?"

"My conclusions, or deductions, from that fact are the same as yours must be, having listened to what I have told you."

"Nevertheless, I prefer to hear them from you, Mr. Harler."

"I make only the natural deduction, recapitulating the events of the entire evening and night."

"Well?"

"Lucile must have made an appointment with some person to go outside the house that night. The appointment was doubtless made for midnight, or about that time, as witness the fact that she remained below stairs until approximately half-past eleven—until she was assured that almost everybody in the house had retired, or, at least, gone to their respective rooms."

"Yes. And you think?"

"That the person with whom she had the appointment took the ladder to the window, threw the end of it to her, and that she made the hooks of it fast underneath the sill of the window and descended by the ladder to the ground. Now, I have a little personal observation to interpolate right here."

"What is that?"

"I went to my own room immediately after Lucile went to hers. I stuck my head out of the window and held my right hand out from it, discovering that the rain had almost ceased, and that only a slight mist was falling—barely enough to have dampened one's garments."

"I see."

"At one side of the lawn, perhaps a dozen rods from Lucile's window, there is a summerhouse, fashioned like a pagoda. My assumption is that when Lucile climbed out at her window she was taken, or she went, to that summerhouse, and remained there nearly all the time she was absent from her room."

"Why *nearly* all the time?"

"Not all the time, Mr. Carter, for the reason that the clay on her shoes and petticoat could not have been picked up anywhere between her window and the summerhouse."

"I see. Where, then?"

"I racked my brains at the time for an answer to that very question, and I found one."

"You are quite familiar with the grounds around Thornton Arms, I suppose," said the detective, in much the same voice he had used a little while before in commenting upon the lawyer's zeal.

"Yes. The winding roadway which leads from the porte-cochère at the front of the house to the gateway at the lodge, is made of ground-stone gravel; the foundation for it, the roadbed proper, is of the hard, yellow clay that abounds in that section. In places along the roadway the gravel has been worn through to the clay, or ground into it, and there are spots where the clay is exposed. When rain falls upon those spots, they become soft, and will readily accept and retain the impression of a footprint."

The detective nodded again, but he said nothing.

"The summerhouse," continued the lawyer, "being not far distant from the house, and also a place that offered seclusion, would be the natural rendezvous for such an occasion as we must judge that one to have been, and——"

"Wait a moment. What sort of an occasion do you consider it to have been?"

"I am coming to that in a moment."

"Well?"

"We may not consider who the person was whom Lucile met outside the house; we do not know whether it was man or woman—the presumption being, of course, that it was a man. But, nevertheless, we can refer to that individual only as a person. Now, afterward I searched for, and found, marks of Lucile's shoes in two of the bare spots on the roadway, where the yellow clay is exposed; so, you see, she must have gone as far, or nearly as far, as the gate at the lodge with her companion before they parted."

"Well," said the detective, "if she did that, and parted with her companion at the gate, returning alone to her room and entering it in the manner she went from it, what became of the rope ladder that you could not find?"

"Ah, sir, that is exactly the point which strengthens the theory I have constructed."

"I imagined that you had succeeded in constructing a theory. What is it?"

"That Lucile met the person by previous appointment, and agreement, for some purpose now unknown to us; that he tossed the end of the ladder to her, and that she descended by it, after she had fixed it in place; that she accompanied that person to the summerhouse, where the interview between them took place; that, when the interview was at an end, she walked down the driveway toward the lodge with that person; that she parted with that person and retraced her steps to the house and to the ladder hanging from the window, intending, doubtless, to draw the ladder inside after her, and to conceal it in her room.

"But, that the person who had been her companion followed her, holding back until she had entered her room and was about to draw the ladder inside; that then the person ascended the ladder and succeeded in entering the room, possibly before she was aware that she had been followed; that the murderous blow was struck at that time, the deed committed, and that the murderer escaped, taking the rope ladder along in the flight."

"How could that person have dislodged the hooks that were imbedded in the woodwork of the window sill inside the room—if that person were outside on the ground?"

"I think it could have been done; I am convinced that it was done."

"By shaking the ropes, and throwing them from side to side, until the hooks in the sill became loosened?"

"Yes."

"I asked you a moment ago if you had formed any opinion in reference to the person who was her companion, if we cling to your theory, Mr. Harler?"

"And I said I was coming to that part of it."

"Yes."

"I haven't formed any opinion upon that point, unless it is a negative one."

"How is that?"

"I am ten years older than Lucile. I have known her and her sister all their lives. My father and grandfather were attorneys for her family before I was born. I have been socially intimate with the family all my life since I can remember."

"Well?"

"Lucile Allerton was always an exemplary young woman. Her high sense of pride would have kept her from any sort of entanglement which such a proceeding as the one I have described would suggest, even if her inclinations tempted her otherwise. But I cannot believe, knowing her as I did, that she even had such inclinations. Therefore, Mr. Carter, I am firmly convinced that the meeting in the summerhouse was not a love tryst—that it was not an improper one in any sense of the word, save only in the questionable method she employed in leaving the house."

"I understand you."

"Therefore, while the person she met might have been a man, and while that is the very natural conclusion in regard to it, I do not think it was a man."

"You think it was a woman, then?"

"Yes."

"Did you find other footprints than Lucile's in the soft clay, Mr. Harler?"

"No. I did not."

"Not even in the grass beneath the window of her room, nor in the clay?"

"No."

"Not a trace of any such thing?"

"No."

"Nor anything at all to indicate that she met such a person?"

"Not a thing. The only evidence of her having met another person is the rope ladder."

"You must have kept those people waiting a long time who were clamoring at her door?"

"I did. Mr. Carter, I would not admit them until I had made the examination I have described; until I had wiped away, with my handkerchief, the evidences of her having been outside the house. I think I have told you all the circumstances now up to the moment when I opened the door and admitted James Thornton and the others to the room."

"And then?"

"Even then I did not admit them. I halted them at the threshold, and ordered them to advance no farther until the coroner had been there to view the body. I stated it as my opinion, then, that Lucile had fallen, and been killed by striking her head against the sharp corner of the ebony dresser."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A CRIME WITHOUT A MOTIVE.

"Mr. Harler," said the detective, "there are several points upon which I would like to ask some questions."

"Very well, sir."

"You have shown yourself, by what you have told me, as something of a detective yourself; and so, in the first instance, I will ask only for your opinion. I am particularly desirous in knowing that."

"Yes?"

"You say that if a metallic weapon, shaped like a squared cone—or shall I say pyramid-shaped?—were used in committing this crime, it would have made just the sort of wound you discovered on Lucile Allerton's head, above the right temple."

"Yes."

"And, in your opinion, the corner of the ebony dresser could not have inflicted that wound as you saw it?"

"I regard it as utterly impossible."

"Yet, you have told me that bloodstains were on the corner of the ebony dresser. Now, how do you explain them? How did they get there? The body was on the floor with the head toward the bureau, or dresser."

"It is my belief, sir, that the murderer smeared that blood upon the sharp corner of the dresser, with a deliberate intent to suggest it as the cause of death."

"Oh! Then he—or she, if it were a woman—must have dabbled her fingers in the blood of the victim for——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Carter. There is always the possibility that the blood on the corner of the dresser may have got there by accident."

"How?"

"How? Why, the murderer might have got blood on his or her hands in committing the deed. The shock of the affair, and the horror of it, may have caused the assassin to stagger away from the victim; and what more natural than that the aggressor should have grasped that corner of the dresser for support?"

"I see. But that is rather far-fetched, isn't it?"

"Perhaps; yet not more so than other things in connection with this case."

"I quite agree with you as to that. How do you account for the bloodstains on the tips of the first, second, and third fingers of the right hand?"

"I have already accounted for them as well as I am able to do so. I must remind you that I am not a detective. I am a lawyer, accustomed to searching for evidence, wherever it may be discovered; that is all."

"And what sort of an instrument do you suppose Lucile was struck down with?"

"As to that, I haven't even an idea."

"But do you think that when the blow was struck, notwithstanding the force of it, and its stunning effect, she still had strength—spasmodic strength, if you will—enough to raise her right hand to her head, even while she was in the act of falling; and notwithstanding the fact that she fell so suddenly and so quickly that her left arm was bent and crushed beneath her body, fracturing the wrist?"

"I can explain it in no other way."

"It seems to me that in that case the right arm should have been bent, also; that it would have been next to impossible for it to have fallen into the position in which you found it under those circumstances."

"I understand what you mean, Mr. Carter; and yet, people so struck will make spasmodic movements and gestures frequently, even after death is supposed to have ensued."

"All right. We will pass that for the present. And now, before we come to the point where you admitted other persons to that room, tell me something of the home relations of the young woman."

"I will be glad to give you any information you ask for, if it is within my knowledge."

"Lucile and her sister inherited together all the great fortune left by their father, you said?"

"Yes."

"They were twins, and were to come into personal possession of the property on the occasion of their next birthday?"

"Yes."

"And in the event of the death of either of them, I suppose the survivor inherited the share of the other?"

"Provided that there had been no issue from the one who died—yes."

"So, now Sybil Allerton will inherit the entire estate, in her own right, and will come into control of it on her next birthday?"

"Yes."

"The property is very large?"

"Enormous. If your questions are intended to suggest that Sybil Allerton would be interested in the death of her sister, to the point of rendering her a suspicious character under the circumstances, I must remind you that the idea is absurd for a thousand and one reasons."

"Quite so; the principle one being that she has enough without her sister's share."

"More than enough."

"Give me one or two more of the many reasons."

"They were twins, and, although unlike each other in appearance and temperament, were as strangely sensitive to conditions which affected each other as twins were ever reputed to be. Moreover, the very differences between them has seemed to make them more fond of each other. Never have I known of a case where sisters loved each other so fondly."

"Has Lucile had any other love affair than this one with James Thornton?"

"Never one that could be called serious."

"Well, is there a young man—or a middle-aged one, for that matter, anywhere about who has been seriously in love with her, even though she did not return it?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"An heiress like Lucile should have listened to many declarations of love; should have had occasion to refuse many suitors, Mr. Harler."

"Quite so. I do not suppose that she was an exception to the general rule; but she never talked about such things. If she had offers, she did not tell about them."

"You know of no circumstance of that kind which might have led so far as the appointment in the summerhouse last Saturday night?"

"No, sir. Not even the semblance of one."

"And in the case of Sybil?"

"I would make precisely the same replies to the same questions."

"Of the two sisters, which was the more beautiful?"

"That would be according to a person's taste, Mr. Carter. Lucile was a dark brunette, of distinctly a Spanish type, as I have said; Sybil is a pronounced blonde."

"Are you a married man, Mr. Harler?"

"No. I am a bachelor."

"And ten years, only, older than the sisters. Now, which way did your own tastes lead? Of the two, which have you regarded as the more beautiful?"

"Really, sir, I don't think I have ever quite determined that question in my own mind. Perhaps my admiration has been given more freely to Lucile than to Sybil, although I must confess that Sybil has been the more gracious of the two."

"Mr. Harler, have you ever been in love with either of them?" the detective asked, with a bluntness that was almost inexcusable.

The lawyer flushed hotly under the question; he replied with some haughtiness:

"If I have admired either of them more than I ought, I have had the good sense to keep it to myself, sir, and I shall continue to do so."

"As the attorney for the family, can you offer no suggestion whatever which will assist in seeking out the identity of that person with whom Lucile had an appointment in the summerhouse last Saturday night?" asked the detective.

"Mr. Carter, I have thought and thought upon the subject, and the more I think about it the farther away I seem to get from any idea which will suggest a solution of the problem."

"Now, when you opened the door of that room to admit those who were waiting outside, who entered? Tell me about that part of the scene."

"It seemed to me that every member of the household, servants included, were there. Mr. Thornton was the first to enter the room, but, as I have said, I stopped him and the others at the threshold."

"Where was Sybil Allerton?"

"Sybil was in a fainting condition, in the hall outside. Thornton's mother was with her. They were both very much overcome. Jimmy—that is, Mr. Thornton—was like a madman. It was all that I could do to calm him at all."

"Can you give me a list of the names of all who were present at the house that night?"

"Yes. I have one made out for you. I anticipated that request, and came here prepared to meet it."

"Very good. You say that the betrothal between James Thornton and Lucile was announced six weeks ago, but I understand that the two families have always been on more or less intimate terms, have they not?"

"Y-yes."

"You seem to hesitate over that reply, Mr. Harler."

"Well, since the death of Jimmy's father, the young man has been abroad a great deal. He has, in fact, been rather wild. It is only in the last year that he has settled down. But I need not tell you of that; it is public property. Heaven knows that the newspapers have said enough about it at one time and another."

"Oh, yes; but the thing that I am trying to get at is as to how it happened that James Thornton has only lately discovered himself to be in love with Lucile. Can you explain that point to me?"

"Not being a psychologist, I cannot."

"I wonder, Mr. Harler, if you remember one thing I said to you at the beginning of this talk?"

"What was that?"

"It was in reference to telling your doctor, your lawyer, and your detective, the *whole* truth about a case in which you expected help."

"Oh, yes, I remember that."

"Well, why don't you tell me the whole truth, then? I remember, distinctly, two or three years ago or more, of seeing an account in the papers of the betrothal of James Thornton and Miss Sybil Allerton. How did it happen that he changed his allegiance to Lucile, and that both sisters accepted the change? That might be an interesting bit of information, Mr. Harler. Can you give it to me?"

"Yes. I think so."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WENTWORTH.

"The fact of the matter is," said the lawyer, after a short pause, during which he knitted his brows in perplexity, "Jimmy, as I call him, has always been about equally in love with each of the sisters, and has never, until lately, been able to determine which one he admired the more. The betrothal which existed between him and Sybil was really an arrangement that was made between his father and her mother, while they were children. Lucile was considerable of a hoyden then. She was pert, saucy, ungovernable, and, at times, unmanageable altogether. Nevertheless, she was her father's favorite, just as Sybil was her mother's pet child. Both families lived in town in the winter, and less than a block apart; in the summer Thornton Arms and Allcourt were their homes, respectively.

"Jimmy, being four years older than the sisters, was more like a brother to them than anything else. It was understood that Jimmy was to marry Sybil, since they were mere children. Then Jimmy's father died, and he came into the fortune. He went abroad; he became wild; he did things of which the sisters and their mother did not approve. Then Mrs. Allerton followed her husband to the grave, and Lucile took the lead in all things at home. When Jimmy got so very wild that his name constantly appeared in the papers, the Allerton sisters refused to receive him at all, and he, figuratively, told them both that he didn't care a rap, and went away again.

"About a year and a half ago he announced his reform. Nobody believed him, but he made good. Ultimately the intimacy between them was renewed, but this time Jimmy paid court to Lucile instead of Sybil—and that is all I know about it. If you should ask me if Sybil had a regret about it, I should answer that she did not; rather that she was pleased by the change."

"That seems to be a very clear statement of the conditions, Mr. Harler. Is Sybil in love with any other person?"

"I think not. If she is, it has not been announced."

"Who has chaperoned the sisters since the death of their mother?"

"A Mrs. Van Duyk—a distant relative."

"How distant? What is her relation to them?"

"Their mother was Mrs. Van Duyk's second or third cousin, I believe."

"Mrs. Van Duyk was a member of the house party last Saturday night?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Harler, I will repeat to you the remark you made to me when you were shown into this room; or will you endeavor to repeat it, word for word, for me? We have drifted a long way from it. It is time now that we got back to it."

"Certainly."

"Well?"

"I said: 'Mr. Carter, I have followed you from New York to Washington, instead of telegraphing to find out if you were on the point of returning there, because one branch of an inquiry and investigation I wish you to make for me relates to a lost letter, and it occurred to me that the Post Office Department here in Washington might be available for information, if you were here on the ground to obtain it in person.'"

The detective was smiling broadly when the lawyer completed the somewhat stilted statement.

"That sounds," he said, "as if you had studied that disclosure of your business very carefully. You have repeated it, I should say, word for word as you uttered it when I first saw you. I suppose that is the result of having what is called a 'legal mind,' eh?"

"Quite possibly," replied the lawyer stiffly.

"We'll let it go at that, anyhow. Then, you added: 'The other part of the inquiry relates, I may say, to a crime; to a murder.' That is correct, isn't it? And you added that the lost letter, having been properly addressed, stamped, and mailed, was never received, and if it were found it might throw some light upon the mystery of the murder."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I suppose you have played just a little bit to the gallery, Mr. Harler; eh?"

"I don't understand——"

"I mean that you have studied the dramatic effect of the thing; that you have saved the best thing for the last thing. Well, let's hear what the last and best thing is."

"Mr. Carter, if you are making game of me, I——"

"Making game of you? Not at all, sir. You are a lawyer. During the last five days you have turned detective without realizing it, and you have really accomplished some very excellent results. I don't think I could have done any better in that room where you found the body of Lucile Allerton."

"Thank you."

"It is quite natural that you should wish to make all the points you can in the case, not only to assist me in what remains to be done, but in justice to yourself. So, now, as to the lost letter. What of it? Who wrote it?"

"Lucile Allerton wrote it."

"Ah; you interest me at once. To whom was it addressed?"

"The letter was addressed to me; the envelope that contained it was not?"

"What's that?"

"I repeat; The letter was addressed to me; the envelope that contained it was not."

"Go on, Mr. Harler. There is more on that very point, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

"The envelope which should have contained the letter, and which was addressed to me, came duly to my hand. It contained a letter that was not intended for me—a letter to another person."

"I see. I am beginning to understand."

"The letters were written at the same time, evidently; they became mixed, when they were placed in the envelopes."

"Precisely. Have you noticed, Mr. Harler, that when a woman writes a letter, she invariably addresses the envelope before she writes it? If there are two or three letters to write at that sitting, she will sometimes address the several envelopes before any of the letters are begun?"

"Yes. I have noticed it, often. Probably that is the manner in which these two became mixed."

"Doubtless. Well, what was the letter that you actually received?"

"It was written, and by Lucile Allerton, three weeks ago. Here it is. I will give it into your hands in a moment; but first let me say that inclosed in the envelope with it was a second folded paper which I shall also show to you. If it were not for that I would not have known the name of the person to whom the letter was addressed. Here is the letter."

The lawyer passed a folded single sheet of paper to the detective, who took it and read silently:

"SIR: The continuance of this sort of thing is impossible; a repetition of your last communication, or anything in the nature of it, would be unbearable. Since there is no other way to put a stop to your insistence, I have determined to place the entire matter in the hands of my lawyer, and to that end have written to him, by this mail, a plain statement of all the facts. He will know how to deal with you and your

threats, which amount to blackmail—and he will deal promptly and wisely. LUCILE ALLERTON.

"May, the nineteenth."

"This is rather a remarkable document," said the detective, raising his eyes to the face of the lawyer and looking sharply at him. "It suggests a good deal, Mr. Harler. What was the inclosure?"

"This," replied the lawyer, and passed a second folded sheet of paper to the detective. But he retained his hold upon it for a moment, while he said: "The contents of this paper may give you the impression that I have willfully deceived you in regard to one matter concerning which you have questioned me; but my opinion is the same as I have stated it. Notwithstanding the contents of this paper, which evidently purports to be a copy of an original—a copy which, for some reason, Lucile thought it wise to return to the person who sent it to her—that is the only way I can understand it."

The detective took the paper in his hand, but he did not open it at once.

"To what part of my questioning do you refer?" he asked.

"You asked if there had ever been entanglements in the life of Lucile—or words to that effect. Well, possibly entanglements is not the correct word; love affairs, then."

"Yes. Well?"

"I said that there had not; I still believe what I said. That paper would suggest that there had been one, but I doubt the authenticity of it. The term that she has applied to it appeals to me, and that is what I think it was meant to be."

"Blackmail?"

"Yes."

"Blackmail, in order to come into existence, must depend upon a hidden secret."

"Yes; but not necessarily one's own secret. It may be the secret of another, which one is endeavoring to conceal for that other."

"True. Do you so regard this circumstance?"

"I don't know how to regard it. I leave that to you."

Nick Carter opened the paper, scanned it rapidly, and refolded it.

"It purports to be the copy of a certificate of marriage," he said.

"Yes."

"Between Lucile and one James Wentworth, said to have been celebrated on the twenty-first day of last October—her twenty-second birthday; but the copy is not complete."

"No."

"It fails to mention the locality where the ceremony is supposed to have taken place, or the name of the person who officiated; and in a penciled footnote beneath I read: 'The original, in full, is in my possession. J. W.' Now, Mr. Harler, will you be good enough to explain to me how it happens that you are so positive that the other envelope which you believe to have contained the letter intended for you, and which was probably addressed to Mr. James Wentworth, did not reach its destination?"

"Lucile told me that it did not reach him."

"When did she tell you that?"

"During the afternoon, last Saturday."

"The day preceding her death."

"Yes."

"This letter is dated three weeks ago. Was last Saturday the first time you talked to her on the subject?"

"Yes. It was the first opportunity; and even then there was very little said. There was no time. We were to have gone into the subject again Sunday; but she was killed that same Saturday night, and more than likely it was this James Wentworth who did it. I did not intend to hold this information back, Mr. Carter, but as I saw things it seemed better that you should hear all the other part of the affair first."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DEAD-LETTER OFFICE.

The detective left his chair and crossed the room toward the window. He stood there in silence several moments; then he returned and resumed his seat.

"Why did you wait more than two weeks before you sought Lucile on this subject?" he asked abruptly, tapping the copy of the certificate, which he still held in his hand.

"In the first place," replied the lawyer, "the information, if you call it that, contained in that envelope, shocked and stunned me. Naturally my first impulse was to credit it; my second was to discredit it altogether. Then I decided that it was best not to let Lucile know of the mistake she had made in sealing the letters, but to pretend that I had received mine all right."

"Your object in doing that?"

"Was to aid her; not to frighten her. She and her sister were out of town. My own business affairs were such that it was not expedient for me to seek her at once; besides, I assumed that there was time enough. I waited, and last Saturday, when I went to Thornton Arms to make one of the party there, I sought the first opportunity to say to her: 'I received your letter, Lucile.'"

"Well?"

"She replied: 'I am sorry now that I wrote it and sent it to you. The person I mentioned in it has gone away out of the country. He did not even receive the letter I sent to him.'

"'Indeed?' I said. 'How do you know that?'

"'I have heard from him, and he told me so,' she replied. And then, when she would have said much more, we were interrupted by Thornton's mother, who called to her. Before she left me she said: 'I will talk with you about it to-morrow, Mr. Harler.' I was content with that—and because of that promise I did not seek to reopen the conversation that evening in the house when I might have done so. She died that night, as you know."

"Yes. Are those the exact words she used in replying to your question?"

"Yes. I suppose she meant to say that she had heard from him, and that he had written as if he had not received her communication."

"But he might have received the letter later. There is no proof that he did not receive it at all."

"No; but there is what a lawyer would call the presumption that he did not get it. From her manner of telling me, I assumed that the man had gone away, out of the country, perhaps, where he would not annoy her any more. At all events, I thought the letter worth seeking."

"Decidedly."

"It will do no harm to search the dead-letter office for it. If it was not delivered, it is likely to be there; and now that Lucile is dead, and cannot explain matters, it seems to me that the contents of that letter, written to me, in which she clearly states that she told me the whole story, is important—in view of what has happened since."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Harler."

The detective crossed to the window again, and stood there looking out for a long time. Finally he turned about, without returning to his chair.

"Mr. Harler," he said, from his place at the window, "when I take a case, no matter who happens to be my client, I make one inevitable rule."

"Yes? What is that?"

"That I must be permitted to conduct it in my own way, and as I please."

"I can see no fault in such an arrangement. Far be it from me to interfere with——"

"That is not the point, Mr. Harler."

"What is the point, then?"

"Sometimes it occurs to me to give directions to my clients which take almost the form, and particularly the significance, of orders."

"Ah! Indeed! We will soften the term, and call them requests. And I assume that you have some such request to make of me. What is it, Mr. Carter?"

Nick looked at his watch.

"There is a train for New York in exactly thirty minutes," he said. "You have plenty of time to catch it."

"I? Catch that train? Why?"

"Because I would like you to meet my assistant and take him to Thornton Arms to-night. I may be detained here a day or two—or I may not. In any case, I want somebody upon whom I can rely to examine the ground at Thornton Arms without delay."

"But the letter?"

"I will attend to that. Your presence will not be necessary."

"I thought——"

"There is barely more than sufficient time for you to get that train, Mr. Harler. I will telegraph to Chick, to meet you, as soon as you have gone. When you arrive at the station in Jersey City take the Hudson tunnel to Twenty-third Street and Sixth Avenue. Buy a red carnation at the flower stand just around the corner, and put it in the lapel of your coat on the right side instead of the left, as would be natural. Chick will notice it, and speak to you. When he does that, take him at once to Thornton Arms, no matter what objection you may feel now to doing so. Now, hurry."

"But——"

"Hurry, please."

"Really, Mr. Carter, I——"

"Mr. Harler, if you really want to find James Wentworth, whom you say murdered Lucile Allerton—don't lose that train I beg of you. The H Street car will get you to the station all right."

The detective, with an inscrutable smile on his face, seized Harler's hat, passed it to him, and then gently, but firmly, assisted the lawyer from the room.

When he had gone, and the door was closed behind him, Nick hastened to the window and threw it wide

open, as if to air the room after the presence of something offensive.

Standing there, the detective saw the lawyer hasten to the street from the hotel, and leap upon an H Street car bound toward the east, and then he closed the window.

Producing a telegraph blank, Nick addressed it to Chick and wrote:

"Thornton extravaganza. Meet Lawyer Harler tunnelarium two-thirds. Carnation right. Posted. Renew. Telescope. To-morrow. Patsickum."

Now, that telegram to look at it seems a mass of nonsense, but when Chick received it he read, in lieu of the words themselves, the translation of them, which was as follows:

"In the matter of the Thornton Arms murder meet a lawyer named Harler at the Twenty-third Street entrance to Hudson tunnel at eight o'clock to-night. (Two-thirds around the clock, as Nick expressed it in the message). He will wear a carnation on the right-side lapel of his coat. Let him believe that you are thoroughly posted regarding what he has told me, but tell him that you would like to hear the entire story over again. Keep a close watch on him. I will return to-morrow. Put Patsy on to the past life and career of Harler."

If you will take the trouble to read this translated message through again, and compare it, as you read, to the cipher that Nick used, you will see the significance of each word.

Tunnelarium stood for the Twenty-third Street entrance to the Hudson tunnel; if Nick had wished to make it the Fourteenth Street entrance he would have written Tunnelopus. Tunneling would have meant the terminal, and so on.

The remainder of the words used are sufficiently significant themselves.

From the character of the message, it will be seen that Nick Carter had gathered some decided views in regard to the case, during that interview with the lawyer.

Unfortunately for us, Nick was not, and is not, one of those persons who talk aloud to themselves, revealing all they think about, and anticipating everything that they hope to accomplish.

If you had been watching him, after he was alone, and after the message to Chick was dispatched, you would easily have guessed that all his talents as a detective had been aroused; and more, that they were now directed at a well-defined object.

It was very shortly after that when he left the hotel, and, also taking the H Street car, hastened to the Post Office Department building.

It happened that the postmaster-general was in his office, and as Nick was known to the official he was received at once.

Ten minutes later he left that private office and went directly to the dead-letter department, carrying with him a note from the postmaster-general, which said that the bearer of it was a personal friend of the general, who would be pleased if every possible courtesy were shown to Mr. Carter in assisting him to a matter of research in which he was interested.

We will call the man with whom Nick talked, in the dead-letter office, Jenkins. That is not his name, but he was the person who had the authority to facilitate matters for the detective in what he wished to do, and who did it.

"Mr. Jenkins," said Nick, when he was asked what he wanted, "I am here in search of a letter which I have no idea that I shall find, but which, nevertheless, it is my duty to seek. It should be addressed to Mr. James Wentworth, somewhere in New York City, but the letter inside the envelope was written to another person entirely—to one Reuben Harler—a lawyer, in fact."

"Don't you know the address to which the envelope was sent?" Jenkins asked.

"No; only that it was New York City. It is a murder case, Jenkins, and no other Wentworth letters would interest me; but, all the same, if there are any such here waiting to be destroyed, or for postage to be forwarded to send them on to their destinations, I want to see them. This note from the postmaster-general——"

"Oh, yes, I'll help you. But how are we going to get at it?"

"I don't know. That is what I came to you to find out."

"Oh; I see. Then suppose you state the case."

"Instead of stating the case, let me suppose one."

"As you please, so long as it affords me a line to work upon."

"Well, so far as stating the case is concerned, I have already done that. The mere stating the case, as it stands, is stating a lie, pure and simple; the supposing of a case, would be theorizing upon what I can make out of the mass of lies that have been told to me."

"I see."

"Well, suppose you were a lawyer who had inherited a rich clientage, and who had amassed something of

a fortune of your own; but a mere bagatelle when compared with the holdings of your clients. Suppose two of your clients were young women, worth millions, and that you coveted those millions, and saw a way to get control of them, if you played your cards dexterously and well. Suppose that in order to carry your plans into execution it became necessary to get rid of one of the young women, and to marry the other one—that in the beginning it didn't make much difference to you which one you married, only, that if you had an untrammeled choice, you would select the dark one in preference to the blonde. Have you supposed all that?"

"I am trying to follow you, yes."

"All right. Listen to the rest of it."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A HYPOTHETICAL CASE.

"Suppose," continued the detective, "that you had plotted and planned toward that end for years. All the while you are more or less handicapped by the presence of a young man for whom you are also the attorney, whose interests you are supposed to guard, whose fortune is as great as that other one, and who, in addition to all those advantages, has been like a brother to the two young women since they were children.

"Suppose that it wouldn't meet with your plans to have him marry either one of them, and that you deliberately set about leading him astray. Suppose that you were instrumental in making almost a wreck of him, and did succeed in driving him from their hearts and homes? Got all that?"

"Yes."

"Do I bore you?"

"No. You interest me. It sounds like a story out of a book."

"It beats a story out of a book all hollow, Jenkins."

"I begin to think it does."

"I am detailing it to you in this manner, as much for my own enlightenment as for yours."

"I don't understand what you mean by that, Mr. Carter."

"I mean—well, I mean this: I have spent two of the most uncomfortable hours of my life in the company of the villain of this tragedy. That's what! I had to be nice to him, and oily with him, and suave, and soft, and to appear entirely gullable as well. I had to make him think that I swallowed whole everything he said, and went him one better. See?"

"I'm beginning to understand you."

"I thought I could lead the fellow into doing or saying something to betray himself, but I couldn't. So far as he is concerned, there isn't a peg in him big enough to hang my hat on. I know that he lied to me from the start, but I couldn't prove that he lied to save myself; nor could I satisfy a third person that he lied to me."

"I see."

"Well, Jenkins, all criminals who plan so carefully, plan too well. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they overdo the thing, and as sure as you're alive, there is some place in this thing where he has overdone it. I want to find that place. It may be in the letters he has referred to."

"Now you are getting down to my part of the affair."

"Not quite yet. We'll go on supposing a little more, first; and mind you, it is all supposing on my part as well as on yours. I haven't really got much more to go by than you have."

"I see."

"While I am leading you on to help me, Jenkins, I am leading myself by the nose, toward a half solution of some of the problems that have occurred to me while I was talking with that scoundrel."

"By the way, where is the scoundrel now?"

"He is on the train, on his way to New York, happy in the belief that he has fooled me to the limit."

"But he didn't fool you a little bit, eh?"

"No; not a little bit, Jenkins."

"Well?"

"Suppose the chap whom you had led astray so that he couldn't marry one of the girls, reformed, returned, made good—also made love, but to the other girl; to the one you preferred. Suppose she accepted him, finally?"

"Well?"

"Now turn about and do some supposing in quite another direction, for this is how I read the circumstance."

"All right. I'm supposing. Go ahead."

"Suppose the other girl—the blonde—was really in love with the young man whom you led astray, all the time, but broke the engagement and sent him about his business when he got to painting towns and cities for a trade. Suppose, when the young fellow returned, that he practically ignored his first love—the blonde

girl—because she had turned him down once and gave all his attention to the dark one; and—here you are—suppose that you saw in all this, an opportunity to win the blonde girl, yourself, for your own wife?"

"I see. I am to suppose that she is too proud to show that she cares a fig for the fellow she was once engaged to, and when he proposes to the other one, she accepts my advances in the spirit of pride, and to make it appear that she doesn't care."

"Exactly."

"Well?"

"Well, it is no part of your plans to have either of those girls marry the young millionaire. You can't marry but one of them, but you want the fortune of both. If one should happen to die, the other would inherit her part of the original fortune left to them by their father. See?"

"Yes."

"More than that, you can't stand for the dark one marrying the young chap, because you are in love with her yourself; and when you find that she is really in love with him, you just say to yourself that it shall not be, and you plot a little deeper than you had intended to do."

"Uh huh."

"Well, here is where the dead-letter business comes in, and I don't in the least understand that part of it yet. But likely enough there was a mock marriage, somewhere, at some time and place; a play marriage, I mean. Those people are fond of charades, and all that sort of thing. Anyhow, there is something to do with a false certificate of marriage—and I can't size that up at all yet. We'll pass it for the present. Maybe our search of this department will tell me something."

"Maybe so. Go on, Mr. Carter."

"We will say that you first plotted to mix the dark girl up in some sort of a scandal, which would blemish her fair name, but that you found when you had gone too far to retreat from it dexterously, that it wouldn't work. The dark girl was too brave, and was made of too good stuff to be imposed upon in such a manner."

"Yes."

"Then you saw a way out of it all. A way that would put all of that great fortune into the control of the blonde girl, who had already accepted you, or had given you every reason to suppose she would do so. You saw a way to succeed with your plot."

"And that way, Carter? I can guess it."

"That way was murder. Nothing else."

"I guessed it."

"But more; working in with that sudden idea, was the old plot about the marriage. A real, or a fictitious character—it doesn't matter which—named James Wentworth, who could be made use of to cover——"

"Excuse me just a minute, Mr. Carter; just a minute," Jenkins interrupted him, and the official started to his feet and almost ran from the room.

He was absent nearly ten minutes, but returned smiling, and resumed his chair, saying as he did so:

"I hope you'll pardon me for leaving you so suddenly, but I happened to think of something which needed immediate attention. Now, please go ahead. You had just mentioned a name in connection with this affair."

"Yes. The name of James Wentworth seemed to startle you into activity, Jenkins. Well, as the plotter, you saw how you could make good use of Mr. Wentworth, whether he were a real, or only a make-believe character. If he were not real, you saw a way to create an existence for him, for you intended to make a murderer of him."

"I see. I think I understand you, too."

"I think you do; but you haven't heard it all yet."

"I suppose not."

"In carrying out the improved plot, you would go into the letter-writing business. You would make free use of that name you had determined should father a crime."

Jenkins nodded.

"Of course," said the detective, with a show of hesitation, "all this is mere guesswork based upon the lie that that fellow has told me this afternoon; but it has a foundation of sufficient fact to make it seem very real to me. We will stop supposing now, and I will relate facts to you."

"The facts about the murder?"

"Yes. Perhaps you have read something about a strange death by accident, at a place near New York, last Saturday night; the place is called Thornton Arms."

"Yes. I have read about it. A Miss Allerton was killed by falling and striking her head, just above the right temple, against the sharp corner of an ebony dresser. Is that the case?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to tell me that it was a murder, and not an accident?"

"Just that. The murderer meant that it should appear to be an accident, and evidently tried hard to make it so appear. But he couldn't make a go of it. The weapon he used, did not make exactly the right

kind of a wound. There was some country policeman or constable up there, or a coroner, or a doctor, or somebody, who was shrewd enough to see that the corner of the ebony dresser could not have made that wound—and the murderer was smart and keen enough to make it appear that he had made that discovery himself, and was the first one to claim credit for it."

"I see."

"All the details as to that, and some other points, will have to be explained later. But the murderer has meant to establish himself in such a way that there would never be the slightest breath of suspicion against him—and there is where he overleaped himself."

"How so?"

"If he had left well enough alone, it is doubtful if anybody would ever have thought of suspecting him. But he tried to be too sure. To make himself ten times doubly sure, he came to me. He told me all the details of the discoveries he pretended to make in that room where the crime was committed. He has told me about a letter sent to Wentworth, and received by him, and about another one which was intended for him, which went to Wentworth. In order that that letter should be in evidence, he pretends, now, that Lucile, the dead girl, had information that the letter was never delivered, and that therefore it must have come to this office."

"While the plain fact of the case probably is that the girl never heard of the letter at all, and did not write it."

"That is my idea. But we shall see."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Carter; there are Wentworth letters here in this office. They had just been sent out for destruction when you mentioned the name. I headed them off, however. I'm glad to say."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DEAD LETTERS.

In all departments of the government, at Washington, there is system.

People who have been compelled to wait until this system operates, call it "red tape." They fume and fret at it, forgetting that it is the very quality to which they object, that renders all service there exact.

Nothing can get in the way of that system once it begins to operate. The President, himself, could not save from mutilation and destruction, paper money that has been condemned. Having once started upon its course to the grinder, it must go there.

This arbitrary rule obtains in the dead-letter office as well. Once letters have passed the last resource, and are condemned to destruction; once the hour is fixed for the end of them, when that hour arrives, the final act is done.

And so, Jenkins, when he made that remark which closes the preceding chapter, he told a whole chapter of things in the one statement.

The detective looked up quickly.

"What do you mean—that you headed them off just in time?" he asked.

"Merely that they were on their last legs, if I may use the term. It may, perhaps, seem strange that with all the detail that I am obliged to attend to here, I should have had my attention called to any particular name, or that I should have remembered it afterward. But everything is not so prosy as one would suppose, here. As a matter of fact we get the nucleus of more romances in this office than in all the other departments of the government put together."

"I can well understand that."

"I will tell you as shortly as possible about the Wentworth letters, and then, if you would take advantage of their discovery, we must make haste. Within an hour from now they will be destroyed—and nothing can save them, or any of them."

"Not even to the extent of making copies?"

"I might consent, for the sake of justice, to turn my back while you made a copy or two, but what good would that do you?"

"Why?"

"You could not prove that they were copies. There would be no way of doing that."

"I see. You cannot officially consent that any copy should be made."

"Certainly not."

"But I may read the letters?"

"Oh, yes, I can arrange that part of it; but for whatever use you may wish to make of them afterward, you must depend upon your memory."

"I see."

"You will not be able to prove anything by what you find here; but it is possible you may obtain information which will enable you to find proof."

"Exactly. Now, will you tell me how it happens that your attention was called to those letters?"

"Merely because of two photographs which were inclosed with two of them; one photograph in each of two of the letters. Carter, I haven't a doubt that one of those pictures represents the face of the young woman who was killed."

"And both of them are probably the sisters I have described to you; the brunette and the blonde?"

"Yes; there isn't really any doubt of that."

"How was your attention called to them?"

"Merely in a casual way. In fact, because of the extraordinary beauty of the two faces."

"Yes?"

"The clerks who handle such letters, finally, before the condemnation, receive them alphabetically. Bear that fact in mind."

"Yes."

"It happened that I was passing through the department when the letter containing the first of the pictures to be received, was opened. My attention was called to the picture by the clerk. I looked at it, and was impressed with the beauty of the young woman."

"Which one was it, the blonde?"

"No; the dark one."

"Lucile; the one who was murdered."

"I suppose so."

"Well?"

"I looked at it, commented upon it, and passed on; and I forgot all about it. But when the other one arrived, containing the other photograph—a day or two later—my attention was particularly called to it. It was in that way that the Wentworth letters, as we call them, became fixed in my mind. There are four of them in all."

"And is there one such as I have described? Where the envelope, although addressed to a Mr. James Wentworth, contained a letter which, itself, was addressed to Reuben Harler?"

"Yes. There is such a letter."

"You say it will be impossible for me to carry away with me any of those letters?"

"Entirely so, Mr. Carter."

"Couldn't I steal one of them? One of the photographs, too?"

"No. You must promise me not to do that."

"Will you bring the letters to me, or shall——"

"I cannot even do that. It will be necessary for you to go with me to the bench where the letters are; and you will have about half an hour in which to look them over. That is absolutely the best I can do for you, and were it not for the letter of the postmaster-general, I could not do that much."

"Very well. Let us lose no time, then."

We will not attempt to repeat those letters here, although they would make interesting reading, and were themselves a story by itself.

But we will satisfy ourselves with the notes that Nick Carter made as he read the letters, for he argued that such notes would serve him better than copies, in what he wished to accomplish now.

They were in feminine handwriting, of course, but whether in the handwriting of Lucile Allerton or not, he could not determine, since her chirography was not known to him. The detective made a mental picture of that writing, determined to remember it as perfectly as possible under the circumstances.

He was well aware that a fairly good counterfeit of that handwriting, would suffice under these circumstances, and he thought that doubtless the lawyer had foreseen just this condition which would prevent the letters themselves from being produced.

How clever it had been, in that lawyer, also, to have waited till the last moment before the destruction of the letters, before he gave the information concerning them, to the detective.

The man must have figured upon the very circumstance that had arisen, to prevent the future production of the letters. It was plain to Nick Carter now, why Harler had been so eager to accompany him to the dead-letter office. He wanted to be present at this particular interview.

For the sake of his own purposes, the detective numbered the letters—or rather, the notes he made about them—from one to six.

The notes were as follows:

"Number One: All letters in feminine hand; probably fairly good forgery of Lucile's handwriting. All letters postmarked at or near the post office nearest to Thornton Arms. All letters devoid of superscription of any kind, except Number Six, which letter is addressed to Harler. Numbers Four and Five contained the photos. Number One begins: 'Why do you insist upon recognition now? You know how impossible that is at present.' It goes on to expostulate, in a girlish way, with the man to whom it is addressed; contains no expressions of affection, except at closing, where it says: 'You know or should know that I have not changed, and will not change, in the respect to which you refer.' The letter is signed 'L,' as are all of them.

"Number Two: 'You must not come here. Your presence might betray the fact of our marriage and that is not to be thought of now.' There are some expressions of affection in this letter, but not many, and they are not emphatic. It closes by saying, 'I have placed one thousand dollars in cash where you asked me to leave it; in the little box under the summer-

house. I will put two thousand more there next Saturday.'

"Number Three: 'Much as I love you, I cannot help regretting the foolish impulse that led me to consent to the clandestine marriage ceremony. Though I am your wife,' etc.; and in another place: 'I will not meet you at night in the summerhouse. It is asking too much of me. There is too much at stake. Don't drive me too far or I may be tempted to betray the whole affair to Mr. H.'

"Number Four: Contains small photo of Lucile, doubtless, although I have never seen her. In connection with the picture it says: 'I am sending you this picture much against my will, and only because you insist. There is, I notice, a veiled threat in your insistence. Please bear in mind that threats only anger me, and may be your undoing if you persist in such a course.' There are no terms of endearment at all in this letter.

"Number Five: Contains small photo, probably of Sybil Allerton. 'Yes, I will send a picture of S. I would prefer that you should have both, rather than only mine. Two are apt to be confusing, where one would be emphatic. It is impossible for me to meet with your demands for money. I am beginning to hate you. I have about decided to defy you, and to deny that we were ever married. I have never been your wife in fact, and I am beginning to doubt if I am such, legally.' Etc.

"Number Six: Is the letter addressed to Harler, to which he called my attention, and which he tried to lead me to believe was placed in the wrong envelope by mistake. It purports to be a confession of Lucile's, in which she relates to the lawyer that she was inveigled into a clandestine marriage by James Wentworth. She recites that she has never been actually his wife, and expresses doubt regarding the legality of the ceremony; she asks, also, should the marriage be legal, if it can be annulled, without publicity; asks him to see her, and to talk with her about it; says that she has written to Wentworth, defying him; etc."

Underneath the notes in regard to the letters, Nick added this:

"The writing and posting of the letters, intended ultimately for the dead-letter office where I, or another, would be directed, or induced to search for them, was a clever move if it had not reacted against itself. It is just the sort of thing that a clever lawyer would devise, and be able to carry out; it is not the sort of thing that a man in the general walk of life would ever think of."

"That does for the Wentworth letters," said the detective, turning to Jenkins, and putting the notes he had made into one of his pockets. "I am very greatly your debtor."

"I hope the reading of them will assist you, Carter," was the reply.

"It will, for it makes me absolutely certain of what was really only surmise before."

"And now, what do you intend to do?"

"I intend to return to New York on the first train that will take me there, and to run that man Harler to earth, right away," was the reply.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SEARCHING INTO THE PLOT.

Nick Carter left Washington that night at eleven o'clock. At half-past six in the morning he entered his own house where Joseph was already astir, and had this to say to him:

"Mr. Chick telephoned last evening, sir, and instructed me to tell you that he had met the man you described, and that you would find a written message addressed to you, at the post office at Thornton Arms, any time to-day."

"Very good," replied the detective. "See that breakfast is served to me as soon as possible. Go to Patsy's room and tell him that I want him at once—to go out of town with me."

Nick related the whole circumstance to Patsy while they were breakfasting together. As soon as the meal was finished, they entered the automobile together, with Danny for the driver, and the big car was headed toward Thornton Arms and Allcourt.

In passing through the village nearest to the two estates, Nick halted at the post office long enough to procure the letter to which Joseph had referred. It was short and very much to the point. It said:

"I am impressed with the idea that Harler is the champion liar of the world. Don't yet know what his lies mean, and just what the lies are. Have put Connor, who happens to be in town, on Harler, instead of keeping tabs on him myself. Came here to dig up what I could. I instructed Patsy as you directed; he will go to work on it in the morning."

Nick had already told Patsy that it would not be necessary, at once, to search the back record of the lawyer; that it could wait for the present, and that the big work to be done right away was located at or near Thornton Arms.

While they were driving the remainder of the distance to the Arms, from the post office, the detective gave Patsy further instructions. He also permitted the assistant to read the notes he had made at the dead-letter office.

"This is Saturday," he said. "It will be one week ago to-night, since Lucile Allerton was murdered. She was discovered dead in her room, during the forenoon of Sunday. The funeral took place Wednesday morning. By this coming Wednesday I desire to have completed this case; to have arrested Harler, charged with the murder, and to have him indicted. I don't know if it can all be accomplished in that time, but we will make the effort of our lives toward that end."

"All right, chief. I'm with you."

"When I enter the house at Thornton Arms, I want you to remain in the car, as if you had nothing to do but wait for me. After a moment, get out of the car, and wander around the grounds, and the lawn, with apparent aimlessness. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Let your steps lead you to the summerhouse I have described, which is probably the one referred to in those letters, where Lucile is supposed to have said that she concealed some money. Doubtless the money is there yet. It would be part of Harler's scheme to have it found there, if it is searched for. But be very careful how you search for it. If Harler put it there himself, which is the case if it is found there, he may have dropped something, or have done something, which will identify him as the one who hid the money—or, at least, as one who has been there, and therefore knew, or knows, that the money is there."

"I understand."

"When you have done that, no matter what you find, make your way across the grounds toward Allcourt. I shall go there as soon as I have finished here. After that, be governed by your own ideas. Talk with grooms and servants. Do whatever you can."

"All right. I understand perfectly what you mean. Shall I make myself known to you, at Allcourt, or is it your plan that we remain strangers."

"Don't make yourself known until I make the first move—unless it is necessary. Keep an eye out for Chick, and tell him where to find me in case you see him first."

The car was driven under the porte cochère, and Nick ascended the steps and rang the bell. Five minutes later—it was then nearly ten o'clock in the morning—he was in the presence of James Thornton.

"I am Nick Carter," said the detective. "Mr. Harler found me in Washington yesterday. He has told me all he could tell, evidently, about the death of your fiancée, Miss Lucile Allerton. I believe, notwithstanding the reports in the newspapers, that you are all convinced that Miss Allerton was murdered. Am I correct about that?"

"Quite so. Yes, sir," replied the young millionaire.

"Mr. Thornton, are you desirous that I should take this case, and find out who it was that murdered the young lady?"

"I will give——" Thornton began excitedly; but Nick interrupted him.

"Never mind that," he said. "Answer my question."

"Yes, then."

"Suppose it should turn out that Miss Allerton was killed by one of your guests, who was here that night: in that case——"

"In that case, or in any case, Mr. Carter, find the murderer, and convict the murderer—and hang the murderer. I forget, they do not hang people in this State, any more—but you know what I mean."

"Yes."

"Make demands upon me, sir, for any assistance that it is in my power to give."

"I'll do that, Mr. Thornton, and I'll do it right now," was the quick reply.

"I don't understand."

"Well, for one thing I want to ask you some questions of an extremely personal nature."

"Ask them."

"No matter what the tendency of them may be?"

"No matter what form they take."

"Perhaps I may go to the extent of putting you under suspicion."

"Do so, if it will help you. Suspect my mother, if you like. I don't care; only find the murderer."

"That's the way to talk. First, is there any doubt that your projected marriage with Lucile, was a love match on both sides?"

"None whatever."

"But formerly you were betrothed to her sister, were you not?"

"Yes; but that was an affair of childhood. Besides, I became very wild, and she threw me over. I have always thought that she was glad of the chance to do so."

"You do not think that Sybil loved you? I will not regard any reply you may make as egostistical."

"I used to think so. I will confess that there have been times when I thought—lately, I mean—that she would have said yes, if I had gone to her the second time, instead of to Lucile. You must not think——"

"I told you I would not. What has been the attitude of Sybil since the murder?"

"Sybil has been too ill to have preserved any attitude at all. I have not seen her since the funeral, although I have sent to her, and have heard from her, twice every day. I will confess to you, also, that since the death of Lucile I have thought many times that after this sad affair has blown over, I will go to Sybil and ask her to be my wife."

"Do you think she would consent to that?"

"Frankly, I do not."

"Why not?"

"Because I have an idea that there is a secret understanding between her and Harler. It is only conjecture on my part, but I think it."

"What is your opinion of Mr. Harler

"Oh, Harler is a good fellow enough—in his place. There are times when he presumes a little, I think, but that is the nature of the man. I would not like to see him marry Sybil, though."

"Why not?"

"I couldn't tell you that, because I'm not sure that I know. Harler is a money getter, a money schemer. He is a deep one, too. I am never quite sure of his meaning. And——" he stopped abruptly.

"What were you going to say?" asked the detective.

"The thing that I was going to say, will sound caddish, and puerile, but I think I ought to say it, nevertheless."

"Then say it."

"It will give you an idea of what I mean in my reference to Harler."

"Yes."

"When I went to the dogs for a time—got to drinking like a fish, gambled, followed the races, took chorus girls to suppers, and did a lot of other things that I knew I ought not to do; it always seemed to me that Harler boosted me instead of holding me back. That's a serious thing to say, but I mean it all the same. He used to lecture me—and go out with me, too. He is only six years older than I am."

"I understand you. But in what way could it benefit him if you went to the dogs, permanently?"

"Search me! Probably he knew, if that was his idea. He's a deep one, as I said."

"Do you think that he was ever in love with Lucile?"

"Was he! Well, I should say! She got so she hated the sight of him. I don't think he ever said anything to her. If he did, she did not tell of it. But he could look it all right."

"Did you ever have an acquaintance named James Wentworth?"

"No. Why?"

"Did you never hear of such a person?"

"Only once."

"When, where, and how was that?"

"Lucile asked me—I don't remember just when it was; two or three weeks ago, I should say—the same question that you just put to me. We were out in the summerhouse on the lawn, at the time."

"Why did she ask the question?"

"I don't know. She did not explain. I asked her why, at the time, and she replied that she had heard of such a person as being an acquaintance of mine, and wished to know if it were true. I told her I knew of no such person."

"Was that the only reason she gave you for asking the question about him?"

"Yes."

"Now, was Lucile a guest in your home, during any part of May?"

"She and her sister were here during the first two weeks of May."

"Was Mr. Harler here, also, at that time?"

"He is always here, it seems. He comes and goes as he likes. There is never five consecutive days when he is not here. Again, why?"

"Mr. Thornton, let me ask the questions, and you reply to them. The reasons for my asking them will all appear later on."

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## CHAPTER X.

### A CLUE ON THE WINDOW SILLS.

"Now, Mr. Thornton," said the detective, "will you take your mind back to the incidents of the evening before the murder. It rained, did it not?"

"Yes; and we remained indoors for that reason."

"Were you out of doors at all during that evening?"

"Why, yes, for just a few minutes; no more. That was right after we had dined. I walked down the driveway as far as the lodge gate, and returned."

"Did you go alone?"

"No; Lucile went with me. I went out upon the piazza; I was smoking. Lucile came out to me there. I asked her to walk down to the lodge and back again, for there was scarcely any rain falling at the time; just a heavy mist that didn't quite amount to a drizzle."

"And she went with you at once?" asked Nick. "Wasn't she wearing slippers at the moment?"

"Now you get down to the fine points. As a matter of fact, she refused to go out, because she was wearing slippers, and I told her to go upstairs and put on her shoes. I waited until she did so, and then we took the walk. We weren't gone more than twenty minutes."

"Did she change her shoes for her slippers, when she returned?"

"No. We had charades, and things. She did not go to her room again until she went to it—the last time I ever saw her alive."

"You are sure about that?"

"Certainly."

"Now, what time did she bid you good night?"

"About half-past eleven near that time. I am not certain as to the minute."

"Who was present at that time?"

"Lucile and Sybil, Jack Farnsworth and his brother, Joe, the Calder girls, Harler, and I."

"Did you all disperse at that time."

"Harler and I smoked another cigarette before we went to bed—after the others had gone."

"Then you went to your room?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Harler, also?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure that he did not go out of doors again after night?"

"Who? Harler? Oh, I don't think he did. The house had been closed up. The servants had retired. There wasn't anything to call him out, and, besides, it was raining."

"Where did Mr. Harler sleep—what was the relation of his rooms, to the others, to those you occupy, for instance—that night?"

"Harler has two rooms that we call his. He always occupies them. He was here last night, in fact. He came late, and went away again early this morning. His rooms are directly opposite mine. But, what the——"

"Please don't ask questions, Mr. Thornton. I may question you quite as closely about yourself, or your mother, as you suggested presently."

"Oh, all right but if you want to know anything about Harler's rooms, why not come along with me now and have a look at them?"

"Not a bad idea."

"He keeps a lot of togs there, all the time, Mr. Carter," said Thornton, leading the way. "This house is practically the only home he has got, that one could call home. He lives at his club in the city. Here we are."

Thornton threw open a door as he spoke—they had ascended the stairs together to the second floor—and Nick entered a spacious room, richly but plainly furnished. The walls were lined with bookcases, engravings hung above them, a flat desk stood in the middle of the floor, a couch was against the wall; beyond it, through an open doorway, was the sleeping room.

From this room two windows gave upon the tennis courts, at the opposite side of the house from the rooms that Lucile had occupied, Thornton explained.

Nick went to the windows and examined them carefully. He drew a chair forward, and sat upon it for a closer view. He drew his penknife from his pocket and pricked at the sill, outside the window, with the point of it. Thornton watched him closely.

"What the deuce are you doing?" he demanded to know, at last.

"Just snooping, Mr. Thornton," replied the detective smilingly. Then, more soberly, "I wonder if it would be too great a tax upon you if I should ask you to take me to the room where the dead body of Miss Lucile Allerton was found."

"I will take you there, Mr. Carter," was the slow reply.

"Thank you. You may remain outside, if you will, while I am within."

They crossed the hall and traversed nearly the length of the house before Thornton halted, drew a key from one of his pockets, inserted it in the lock, and threw open the door.

"Mr. Carter," he said, before the detective could enter the room, "since the day when we found the body of Lucile in this room—since that first examination of it was made, when it was visited by the coroner and all of us—this room has been closed, and locked. Perhaps it is a sentimental whim on my own part, but I have permitted nobody to enter it since that day. I have not entered it myself since then.

"I have said that I would permit no person to enter it again upon any pretext, as long as I live. I wish

to say that I will not permit even you to enter it again. I don't know why I bring you here, now, only that I realize that there is no good reason for refusing your very natural request. When you come out of it again, I shall lock it for the last time."

"I am to understand then that this room—this suite of rooms—is in precisely the condition which obtained when the body of Miss Allerton was found here?"

"Yes; save only the fact that everybody in the house entered and left this room at that particular time."

"Otherwise it is the same?"

"Precisely. Harler begged me this morning to let him enter the rooms—I think he tried a key or two of his own on the door before he came to me—but I would not permit it. If I live to be a hundred, and marry half a dozen times during those years, the door of this room shall never be opened again while I live. Now, go ahead. I'll wait here. I do not care to go inside."

Nick saw that Thornton was deeply moved. He passed into the room in silence, and closed the door after him.

The interior of the room was dark. The shutters had been closed and the curtains were drawn; but Nick raised curtains and windows and threw open the shutters.

He looked at the corner of the ebony dresser; if there had been stains upon it, they had been removed. He searched the under side of the sill, inside the room, at the point which Harler had designated as the place where the rope ladder had been made fast, and he discovered the indentations made by the points of two hooks, just as Harler had described them.

But Nick looked further. He examined the surface of the sill, outside the window, and he found there what he sought—and again he had recourse to the point of his penknife with which he scraped some putty from two more dents in the hard wood of the sill.

That was all the examination he cared to make there, and he closed the windows again, arranging them as he had found them, after which he rejoined Thornton in the hall.

"Thank you," he said. "We will return to the library now."

"Down there," he asked abruptly:

"Did you ever own a rope ladder, Mr. Thornton?"

"Eh? A rope ladder? What an odd question. Why, yes, when I was a kid, I was always climbing into places where I ought not to go. I had a rope ladder then, and I used to make use of it when I didn't want the gov'ner to know what time I got home at night. I used one at school, too, in Concord, New Hampshire."

"Yes. What became of it—or them?"

"Blest if I know. It was kicking around the place about a year ago—we used it for a charade, I remember. Harler could tell you, if you want to know. He always has charge of the 'properties' when we have such things going on. I suppose he put it away somewhere, with the other truck, thinking that it might come in handy some time. We have always been great people for doing charades, and stunts in the amateur theatrical line, you know. We did some last Saturday night. What do you want of a rope ladder, anyhow?"

"Nothing at all. Do you think that Miss Sybil Allerton would see me, if I should call upon her now?"

"I think so. I'll give you a note to her—or, better, I'll call her up on the telephone, and tell her that you are coming."

"Do so, please. But, first, have you an idea where Harler keeps the 'properties' for the theatricals you sometimes have had?"

"Yes; in a chest that stands in a closet in his room. But he keeps it locked. What do you want to find? That rope ladder?"

"I would like to see it; yes."

"All right. Come ahead. If you want to get inside that chest, you shall. We'll bust it open—if you think you can do that."

"Perhaps if the lock is not an extraordinary one, I can open it without breaking it," replied the detective. "Will you wait here for me, or——"

"Oh, I'll go along with you. Look here, Carter, I'm not a dense individual, by any means, and all this business that you are up to points to one thing, so far as I can see it. If I thought there were any grounds——"

"Mr. Thornton, there are grounds, but unless you consent to keep your own council about everything you see me do, or hear me say, I will stop right here."

"Do you mean to tell me that you suspect Harler?"

"I don't mean to tell you anything at all until I know exactly what I have to tell—and I haven't proceeded to that extent yet. Come on."

Nick Carter was several minutes engaged in picking the lock of that chest, but it had to be very much more than an ordinary lock that could defy him for a long

time, and presently he raised the lid of the chest and threw it back against the wall.

There were costumes, wigs, make-up boxes, masks, ragalia, uniforms—many odds and ends of all sorts of things in that chest, and at the very bottom underneath it all, a rope ladder.

Nick drew it out and examined it, going over it inch by inch, carefully.

After a moment he stopped in what he was doing and raised his eyes to Thornton, who was steadily regarding him.

"What would you call that, Mr. Thornton?" he asked, presently, pointing with his finger.

"I'd call it a blade of grass, Mr. Carter; a badly crushed one, too."

"Exactly; and it is still green. It has not had time to dry thoroughly."

"Good heavens, Carter, do you mean that the ladder—that this ladder, locked inside this chest—was used—to—— What do you mean?"

"Read for yourself, Mr. Thornton. I am not ready to talk just yet; nor are you."

"But——"

Nick raised one hand and stopped him.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### WEDDED, YET NOT A WIFE.

"Miss Allerton," said the detective, bending toward her and speaking with deliberation—he had gone directly to her after he left Thornton, and had been received at once—"you are convinced that your sister was murdered; you loved your sister; you would do all that is within your power to do, to find her murderer. That is all true, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; oh, yes, it is all true. But when I stop to think collectedly about it, I am disposed to believe that it was the result of an accident after all. For who could have wished to injure Lucile? There was not a thing stolen from the room, and hence it could not have been a thief who did it."

"Men in my profession, when they work properly, Miss Allerton, begin operations by the process of elimination. You in trying to follow that rule have eliminated only one factor; that of a thief, or a burglar."

"Well, sir?"

"After elimination we proceed by the opposite course. We ask ourselves this question: Where is the positive element?"

"I don't think I understand."

"In the case of your sister, we eliminate theft, jealousy, revenge, sudden anger, discarded love, and so forth. Then we ask, where is there a possible cause for the crime? Where is there an adequate reason for it? Who would have benefited by it? What person might have benefited by the crime, later on? Do you understand that?"

"Yes. But I am the only one who would benefit by the death of my sister."

"That is quite true—at the present time."

"But——"

"But it may not be as true as to the future."

"I do not in the least understand you, Mr. Carter."

"Miss Allerton, I have reason to believe that you are engaged to be married, and that you have concealed the fact from all your friends," said Nick sharply.

Sybil shrank away from him. Then anger blazed in her eyes, and she showed the resentment she felt at this wanton interference with her private affairs.

"How dare you?" she demanded, rising; but Nick retained his seat, and went on remorselessly.

"I dare a great deal, Miss Allerton, when I have the right object in view; and now I have it. It is cruel of me, I know, to deal in personalities—please sit down, for I mean to finish what I have started to say, and it is better that you should hear them than that I should seek elsewhere for the information I wish to obtain; as I shall do if you leave the room and me. It so happens that your personal affairs play a very large part in this crime that has despoiled you of the life of your sister. By her death, you are several million dollars the richer, are you not? Or you will be so, after your next birthday?"

She stared at him without replying, but her very silence gave the affirmative to his question.

"Naturally," the detective went on remorselessly, "that fact would point to you as the only person who would give to the man you married, very great power, by conferring upon him the control of your wealth?"

Still she did not reply. She only continued to stare.

"The man you have consented to marry, you do not love. You never have loved him. You accepted him—shall I tell you why? I know why."

"No. Don't you dare to say it!"

"Very well, we will pass that point. But will you admit now—you have already admitted it in everything but words—that you have promised to be the wife of Reuben Harler?"

"Well, if I have done so, it is my own affair, isn't

it? Oh, to think that I permitted you to come here and subject me to this!"

"It is well, Miss Allerton, that you do not love the man. It is well that you, in fact, despise him. It is well that even you do not intend to marry him, and have so decided since the death of your sister. Am I not right about all that?"

For reply she burst into tears, burying her face in her hands, and sobbing convulsively.

"That is better," said Nick, in a kindly tone. "It is the safety valve, and will relieve you. Do not think me impertinent. I have not meant to be that; but—I will tell it to you now, and prove it to you within a few hours—the man who holds your promise to be his wife, is the man who killed your sister."

Sybil raised her eyes to the detective, wide and frightened.

She clutched at the arms of the chair upon which she was seated. Nick continued:

"You have known—how long a time—that Reuben Harler loved your sister. I have known it, certainly, since he talked to me yesterday. I have known, too, that you never ceased to love the young man to whom you were once betrothed, and that you have bravely sought to hide that fact, since he became engaged to Lucile. Just how you argued yourself into the belief that it would be well for you to accept the lawyer, I will not attempt to say; but his part of it I can explain to you in a few words."

"Explain, then!" she cried out, bending nearer to the detective. "Tell me all you mean, every word of it. All!"

"Lucile never felt anything other than contemptuous tolerance for Reuben Harler," said Nick. "It maddened him, too. He would have been less angered, had she openly despised him. Long ago he determined that he could never win her or her love; but he thought he saw a way to win you."

Sybil was wringing her hands together, but she made no comment.

"He thought he saw a way by which he could win you, and you possessed as great a fortune as your sister. Well, he led James Thornton into evil ways; he brought about a condition which forced you to break your engagement with James. He meant that Thornton should never again get into your good graces, but Thornton was too much of a man to be long under the thumb and influence of such a creature as Harler.

"He reformed, returned—but he gave his allegiance to your sister, instead of to you. Most people would say that that would create another reason why you should have desired the death of your sister; but I have not even thought of that."

"I suppose I should thank you for that much, Mr. Carter," she murmured, with a touch of irony in her voice.

"No; but you should thank me for saving you from the sacrifice of yourself you would have made."

"Oh, I do. I do."

"That man plotted to separate you and James Thornton; he succeeded. He had no idea Lucile would accept him; in that, Harler was mistaken. But that gave him another string to his bow—a string called pique. He made love to you, and to hide your own feelings, you pretended to listen to him; and you were led on and on until you had gone too far to retreat."

"Do you realize how cruelly you are wounding me, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes; but also the necessity for it. Miss Allerton, have you ever heard the name of James Wentworth?"

She raised her eyes in surprise.

"Yes; once," she replied.

"Well, James Wentworth does not exist, so you need not hesitate to tell me all that you heard, and how you heard it. He is a fictitious character. Was it Lucile who asked you about such a person?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

"Once she asked me if I had ever heard of such a man. I replied that I had not. She told me that she understood him to be an acquaintance of Mr. Thornton's; a bad character. She said that a man by that name had written several letters to her."

"What did she do with the letters?"

"She said she had destroyed them; but one note she wrote to him, she told me. It was to the effect that if he dared to write to her again, she would place his letter in the hands of the police."

"That is all?"

"Yes."

"And the subject was not mentioned between you again?"

"No."

"Miss Allerton, there was no James Wentworth—or, James Wentworth was, in reality, Reuben Harler. He wrote to Lucile for no other reason than to obtain a reply from her. A reply that would ultimately

go to the dead-letter office, along with other letters that he wrote himself, or had another write for him—forgeries in your sister's name. He worked out a plot that was fiendish in its aim. I will not detail it to you. It is not necessary now, for the plot has failed."

"Wait, Mr. Carter. About that plot you mention. Was it—was it something about a—about a marriage ceremony?"

"Yes."

"Did he try to convince you that Lucile had married him?"

"Married him? Who? Harler?"

"Yes."

"By no means; but he did try to show that she had married, or that she believed she had been married to James Wentworth."

"Ah. I see it all, now."

"You see it all, now? What do you mean, Miss Allerton?"

"The plot. The degradation of it all. The terrible thing that I have done."

"What terrible thing have you done?"

"I have helped that man to plot the murder of my own sister."

"No, no, Miss Allerton."

"But I tell you, yes, yes. It is so. I have aided and abetted him, and all because I was shamed that my love for James Thornton should have been ignored."

"But I do not in the least understand you."

"Listen, then. I—oh, how shall I tell it to you?"

"Say on, Miss Allerton."

"I am at this moment the wife of Reuben Harler. We were married a month ago, by a justice of the peace in Hoboken. I married him, using Lucile's name when I did so, because he suggested it. It was a cowardly thing to do, but I did it; that is, I permitted him to do it. I did not prevent his doing it. Yes, I married him in Hoboken, a month ago, using the name of my sister. I am his wife! *His wife!*"

"This is terrible," said the detective, sorrowing for her.

"But I left him there at the justice's office. I am his wife only in name—and, oh, how I have abhorred him ever since that moment! Yet, I am his wife."

"Yes, you are his wife, legally, perhaps," said Nick slowly, "but the power of the law shall make you his widow."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WAY THE MURDERER CONFESSED.

That afternoon, acting under the direct advice of Nick Carter, James Thornton called the office of Reuben Harler, in New York, on the telephone, and after some considerable wait, got that versatile attorney and counsellor-at-law to the instrument.

"Oh, Harler!" he said, "this is Jimmy at the phone. How are you?"

"Very well, thank you," came the reply. "I trust that you are feeling better than when I left you this morning."

"Quite so, Harler; quite so, thank you. Oh, I say, Harler!"

"Yes."

"I want you to come out here at once, please."

"I fear that is quite impossible, Jimmy. I am very much engaged to-day, and besides, I half expect that detective fellow, I told you about, to show up at my office to-day. I would like to be here when he arrives."

"All the same, Harler, I want you, and you've got to come. Leave word at the office for that chap—what's his name? Carter?—leave word for him to follow you out here."

"What's the rush, Jimmy? What do you want of me?" Harler asked.

"Well, you know when you were out here last night, and again when you went away this morning, you forgot to mention to me that you had brought a detective chap with you when you came, and that he stayed down in the village last night. Eh?"

"I merely thought it best not to trouble you with it in your present state of mind."

"Oh, my state of mind is all right, only I wish you'd tell me about such things. The fact is that he has been nosing around here a good deal and I want you out here to set him on the right track. He has dug up—or somebody has dug up—something about a fellow named Wentworth. I never heard of such a man; did you?"

"Yes. I have heard the name. What about it?"

"Oh, he is saying that Wentworth is the name of the chap that did that awful thing; that is, it was either his name, or an assumed one. I'm not quite clear as to that. But I want you here. He has been talking a lot of foolishness about other things that Wentworth has done, or has tried to do, until I am all mixed up. You've got to come, that's all."

"What else has been said?"

"I can't tell you now. Something about Lucile having known him. But I won't talk about it over

the phone. You have time yet to catch that three-o'clock train, or you can telephone to the garage for one of my cars. Perhaps you had better do that."

"Very well. If you insist upon it."

"I do insist upon it."

"Very well, I will be there before four o'clock."

It was twenty minutes to four when Harler drove up to the door of Thornton Arms in an automobile and leaped to the ground; and the reader must understand that Nick Carter had been very much engaged ever since his interview with Sybil Allerton.

The detective had returned at once to the Arms after his talk with her.

He had expected to find Patsy just outside the house, at Allcourt, and was rather surprised that the second assistant was not there; but he continued on his way to the Arms, to find Chick with Patsy, in the summerhouse on the lawn, where both were very much interested in a conference they were holding.

Nick had stopped at the house long enough to have a few words with Thornton, before he continued on his way to the summerhouse, and to tell the young millionaire that his presence might be required at any moment, and that he was to remain within call.

Pausing in the doorway of the summerhouse, Nick Carter smiled at what he saw there.

Half of the flooring of the place had been torn up and was neatly piled at one side.

Much of the soft earth beneath it had been dug at and torn, showing that some sort of a methodical search had been going on.

The two assistants were seated side by side at the table near the centre of the place. They were deep in the discussion of something that interested them, when the doorway became darkened, and they looked up to discover Nick Carter.

But in that first glance around the summerhouse, Nick had discovered another thing which puzzled him; and that was that a barrel had been turned with the opened head downward, in one place where the earth had been uncovered by removing the flooring.

"Well, boys, what is it?" said the detective, approaching them.

"You talk first, Chick," said Patsy. "I'll tell my story afterward."

"When I came here last night, with Harler," said Chick, "I pretended to remain in the village; but I thought it best to follow Harler, all the same, and so I came along after him, just far enough behind so that he wouldn't suspect that he was being followed. I saw him enter the house, and could see him afterward, through one of the windows, while he was talking with young Thornton. After a time the lights went out, and later I had no difficulty in determining which windows opened into the room occupied by Harler.

"Well, I got back there in the shrubbery, lighted a cigar, held it so that the light of it could not be seen, smoked, and watched. Then I got a trifle curious when the light in Harler's room didn't go out, and going closer I found that an old wisteria vine trailed itself almost across that window. It was big enough, and strong enough to hold me, so I shinned up it and looked into the room.

"There was a white shade drawn down over the window, but it was uneven, so that quite a space was left at one side of it, and I could see into the room. Nick, I saw enough in that first look to convict Harler."

"What was it? What did you see?"

"He was on his knees on the floor. He had pulled the rug aside, and uncovered a hole in the floor, and he was lifting an object out of that hole—just a hole made by lifting a section of one of the boards."

"Yes."

"The object he held in his hand was a pyramid-shaped piece of galvanized iron, such as is used for the bottom end of a pole in a circular lawn tent. While I watched him, he held it in one hand for a moment and shuddered; then he wrapped it in a piece of paper, covered the hole in the floor, drew the rug over the place again; arose, grabbed his hat, and started for the door."

"It was the weapon he used in committing the murder, that you saw," said the detective.

"Oh, there isn't any doubt of that. There is a stain of blood on it, too. I've got it. He brought it out here. I dropped to the ground when I saw him about to leave the room. He came out of the house, over here to this summerhouse, and I waited outside. When he returned to the house I let him go. Well, Patsy and I have been digging here, and we have found that weapon—and Patsy has found something more. By the way, Nick, did you notice, when you talked with Harler, a peculiar ring he wears on the third finger of his right hand?"

"Yes; a silver ring in the shape of a Maltese cross."

"That's right. Now, Patsy, you talk."

"Come here, chief," said Patsy, rising.

He crossed the floor and lifted the barrel from its place.

"Look there," he said, pointing to the soft earth under the place where the barrel had been placed to protect it.

And Nick Carter, stooping down and looking, saw upon the soft earth before him, a clear and distinct impression made by the ring that had just been described.

If the man who wore the ring had sought to leave a clean-cut impression of it there, he could not have accomplished the purpose better, although it was certain that he had no idea that such an impression had been made there.

But there it was, clearly and distinctly; and then Patsy explained.

"I came here to look for that money, as you told me to do," he said. "You said it would be in a box, and probably would not be hidden very carefully, for it was intended that it should be discovered. Well, there it was, right there, only half covered with earth, as if it had been done hastily. I had lifted the box out, and opened it; I had found the money that he put there, intending to make it appear that Lucile left it there for the purpose you told me about; and then I happened to look down—and I saw that impression."

"But you did not know anything about the ring that Harler wears, Patsy."

"No; but I did know that whoever it was who concealed that money there, he or she wore a ring like that—and it didn't look to me like a ring that a young woman worth millions would wear. Chick and I were considering making a plaster cast of it, when you came."

"It won't be necessary now," replied the detective.

And so it will be understood that when Harler appeared at the house the detective was ready for him.

Chick was in the hallway of the house, with Thornton, when Harler came; Nick and Patsy were upstairs in Harler's room.

"What is this that you have been saying about a man named Wentworth?" Harler demanded of Chick, the moment he appeared; but Chick, instead of replying to the questions, stepped quickly forward, seized Harler by the arms, whirled him around, and locked a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, saying at the same time:

"Harler, you're my prisoner;" and then, before the astonished man could reply, Chick hustled him along the hall, up the stairs, and toward Harler's room, closely followed by James Thornton.

When Harler was thrust into his own room—that is, the room that was called his by courtesy—he found Nick Carter and Patsy seated there beside an open chest. Beside the chest, on the floor, was the rope ladder with its grass stains, the pyramid-shaped bit of galvanized iron with its bloodstain, and a square clod of earth which held the impression of the ring.

Nick Carter pointed toward them.

"Look," he commanded. "Look, and confess, you murderer."

Harler took a step nearer. His eyes stared. He bent forward, fixing his eyes upon first one object and then another, until they rested upon the impression made by the silver ring. He bent forward still more, looking at the impression.

Then he raised the hand that held the ring, as if to examine that—but he put it to his lips quickly, pressed upon a concealed spring, cried out sharply, and fell back, dead.

He had ejected from the ring half a dozen drops of prussic acid upon his tongue.

And so Sybil Allerton was a widow indeed, although not precisely by process of law.

THE END.

Don't on any account overlook next week's issue. If you do you will miss a rare treat in one of the most peculiar cases that ever came into Nick Carter's hands. You will certainly agree that the disappearance of the millionaire heiress, and the circumstances connected with it, form one of the greatest puzzles you have ever heard of, and you will be intensely interested in following Nick as he works it out in the brilliant manner that is all his own. The title of the tale is, "The Allerton Millions; or, Nick Carter's Clue Before the Crime." Keep a sharp eye out for number 720, which will surely be issued next week.

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# HAWK-EYE JACK.

Every one who has crossed what used to be known as the Great American Desert, embracing the lands that lie between Atchison, Kansas, and Denver, Colorado, will recall easily the well-known ford of the North Platte River, at Hawk-eye Ranch, where trains stop to renew their outfitter's stores. The ranch is kept by one Jack Reed, a literal type of the adventurous frontiersman, who bears the name of Hawk-eye, from the wonderful blackness and brightness of those orbs with which nature has endowed him. Jack Reed could see farther over the prairies than the best scout that ever squinted along the barrel of a rifle.

No one knows this man's history previous to the spring of 1860, when he arrived and established himself at this ford of the North Platte, which place has since come to be named after him. Here he erected an adobe house, which from time to time he strengthened into a miniature fort to protect himself and family against the hostile Indians. Hawk-eye Jack was a wonderful shot, and especially at long range, his excellent sight giving him peculiar advantage. I have never seen but one man his equal as a marksman, and his specialty was the pistol. Sometimes strangers would stop at the ranch and boast of their being good shots, and perhaps challenge Hawk-eye Jack to a trial of skill. He let them select their own distance and target, then when they had fired, he would bring his rifle to his eye with a rapid motion and fire instantly. His ball was always found to have entered the same hole which his opponent's bullet had made!

"Your bullet is my mark," he would say coolly.

"You can't see a bullet hole that distance," was frequently the rejoinder.

"Fifty dollars against twenty I cover the two balls by another shot!"

But the strangers found they had a man with whom they could only bet to lose, and so they acknowledged "beat" and went on their way.

In 1866 I was taking a large surveying party to Colorado, and we made up our train at Atchison, consisting of fourteen mule teams, having some heavy machinery to transport in the wagons. It was before the iron horse had crossed that arid route or a rail had been laid west of Kansas. We could not make more than twenty miles a day, in the way of progress, corralling our teams at night and making all necessary arrangements against the roving Indians, who were the literal bandits of the plains. As we had broken down with one of our teams just about a couple of miles before reaching Hawk-eye Ford, I ordered a halt for a whole day to repack the wagons and leave the broken one behind.

During the performance of this duty by the men, I mounted my sturdy little white saddle horse and went forward to visit Jack's establishment. It happened to be a very quiet day, and there was scarcely a soul about the premises save the family itself. The ranch was fully twelve miles from any other, and it was only when the Halliday mail wagons passed, or an occasional mule train camped near by, that any one came there at all. Now and then buffalo or antelope hunters dropped in, and occasionally some two or three venturesome miners, who, trusting to their rifles and good horses, crossed the plains without escort. As I rode up to the ranch I heard some pistol shots, and loosened my own revolver, thinking I might need it for self-defense.

I rode round to the rear of the adobe, to see what the shots signified which seemed to be fired there, and beheld a singular sight. A tall, slim, wiry-built man was standing by the side of a young girl, who could not be more than fourteen years of age. The child, for she seemed but little more, was firing at a mark some thirty paces distant, with a bright-barreled revolver, and listening to the criticisms and suggestions of the man by her side. He turned toward me, and I knew in an instant, by those large, piercing black eyes, that it was Hawk-eye Jack, though I had never seen him before.

"That'll do, Minette," he said to the child. "You will shoot as well as your father by and by."

The girl seemed pleased with the compliment, and left us as she turned to go into the adobe. She was decidedly pretty, with her father's eyes and a round, well-developed figure, clothed in a boyish style, yet in no respect immodestly dressed. She wiped the revolver carefully as she walked away, and returned it to the leather sheath hanging from a belt at her side.

"You camped just below, last night, stranger," said the man to me, "and I saw you coming up."

"Yes, we have laid over for repairs."

"Walk in and have something, stranger!"

"Thanks," said I, following him into the dwelling.

At my request he prepared a couple of large mugs of punch, and, accepting one of the excellent Havanas I had brought from the East, we sat and smoked and chatted very sociably together for a long while. He enjoyed the cigar hugely," as he said, being of so much finer flavor than the Virginia weed which he used in his pipe. Jack warmed up over the punch and tobacco, and was full of stories of frontier life and adventures.

"What family have you here?" I asked.

"Only Minette and her old aunt," he said, and looked sharply at me with a sort of inquiring expression.

"I should think it would be lonely."

"Sometimes, but I have an object," he said grimly.

"To make money, I suppose, like the rest of us."

"Money? Well, yes, I do trade a little, but then that is not my object," he said, with a stern expression.

"What is it?"

"Vengeance!" he replied, with a look so savage and so hoarse a voice that I was startled.

"On whom?" I asked.

"The redskins!"

We had finished our cigars and punch, and at my suggestion both were renewed, my host growing more and more communicative as the stimulant warmed his veins and the tobacco ascended to the brain. At last he said casually:

"Never been along the Platte route before?"

"No."

"I thought so, else you would know something of me and my ranch," he replied, swallowing the smoke and blowing it out of his nostrils.

"How long have you been here?"

"Well, I settled here in the latter part of '59, and had a pretty comfortable time of it till the red devils spoiled all."

"How was that?"

"Well, stranger, to make a long story short, I came here with my wife and three children from Nevada in that year, and set up a sort of trading post here. Things went on very well for a considerable while; business was good with travelers, miners, and now and then the Indians. Every one who came to the ranch went away satisfied, and everything went on the square. I don't know as I had an enemy in the world, and I'm sure I never injured man, woman or child afore '61. One day our little girl Minette had a bad tooth, which set in to ache so bad that I took her with her aunt about twenty miles up the Platte to a government stockade, to get the surgeon to extract the tooth, which he did, and we came back the next day. What do you suppose we saw when we got here?"

"What was it?"

"A smoldering ruin! Excuse me, stranger," said the man, covering his face with his hands; "I don't tell this story often! Destroyed—wife and two children stolen away—all gone!" he sobbed.

"What did it mean?"

The red devils had been here. They knew I was absent, so they stole what they could carry off, and burned the rest. There was nothing left standing. My first step was to get a half-dozen men I could rely upon and to follow their trail to get back my wife and children. We overtook the devils. They would not parley, or I should have tried peaceable means, in order to insure the safety of my wife and children. No; they showed fight at once, and during the scrimmage brought out my wife and killed and scalped her before our very eyes, then dashed out the brains of my two children. That was pronouncing their own doom! There were but fifteen of the gang, and we killed thirteen of them within twenty-four hours, two only escaping after we had pursued them nearly a hundred miles.

"We buried the mutilated bodies of my dear wife and children, and came back to this spot. The first night I lay on the ground and tried to pray, but it was no use. I couldn't do it. The next morning I swore an oath that I would be fearfully avenged upon the hated race of treacherous devils. I took a solemn oath wherever and whenever I saw an Indian I would shoot him like a wild beast. I rebuilt this ranch, pretty roughly, as you see, but securely. I can resist a whole crowd of redskins for twenty-four hours, and pick them off through these loopholes. I have, as you see, plenty of arms," pointing to a half-dozen seven-shooters, and as many excellent revolvers hanging in a rack on the wall; "and I never go about without a pair of these fellows," pointing to his belt, in which were a couple of rifled revolvers.

"They will pick me off one of these days, but I am making minced meat of them in the meantime, and Minette will sell her life dearly when the time comes. You saw her shoot just now. I have taught her so that she can fire a rifle or a revolver better than one man in a hundred; and last fall, when the redskins made a raid upon us, and I got some fine practice before they beat a retreat, she shot a chief dead in his saddle out of that loophole."

In vain were the moral axioms I adduced and the arguments tending to show that "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." In vain I pointed out to the man his better duty to the brave and intelligent child, whom he was rearing under such terrible auspices. Though I really felt, and seriously so, what I said to him, it was worse than useless, seeming only to confirm him in the course he had laid out for his fixed aim in life. His provocation was terrible, but his present career seemed to me to be more so.

"The redskins are getting scarce about here. They know that I will shoot them at sight, and that I can kill farther than any man west of the Missouri with my rifle. This was their favorite ford, but they abandoned it altogether in '63, after losing, at different times, over thirty of their chiefs at the crossing. They have paid dearly, but they haven't half paid yet for the murder of my wife and children."

The deep, large, black eyes of the frontiersman had been all on fire while he told his tragic story, which is well known to travelers by the North Platte route. His cheeks were sunken and his body extremely thin, but he was all muscle and vigor.

"Will you take a little more punch, stranger?"

"No, I thank you."

"Won't you have some dinner, stranger?"

"My people will be expecting me back to camp at noon," I said, as I prepared to depart.

As I went by the small, narrow counter, which formed the bar of the ranch, I observed a long pine stick hung up by a string against the wall, and nicked apparently by a pocketknife. Hawk-eye Jack noticed that I regarded it curiously, and so took it down and handed it to me. After a moment he said:

"You observe these notches cut in the stick—each one represents the life of a redskin. When I shoot one, I cut a notch. If you count these notches you will see they are rising seventy in number. I call it my Indian death Tally!"

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## HENRY WARD BEECHER'S ADVICE TO HIS SON.

BROOKLYN, N. Y., October, 18, 1878.

MY DEAR HERBERT: You are now for the first time really launched into life for yourself. You go from your father's house, and from all family connections, to make your own way in the world. It is a good time to make a new start, to cast out faults of whose evils you have had an experience, and to take on the habits the want of which you have found to be so damaging.

1. You must not go into debt. Avoid debt as you would the devil. Make it a fundamental rule: No debt—cash or nothing.

2. Make few promises. Religiously observe the smallest promise. A man who means to keep promises cannot afford to make many.

3. Be scrupulously careful in all statements. Accuracy and perfect frankness, no guesswork. Either nothing or accurate truth.

4. When you are working for others, sink yourself out of sight, seek their interest. Make yourself necessary to those who employ you, by industry, fidelity, and scrupulous integrity. Selfishness is fatal.

5. Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anybody else expects of you. Keep your standard high. Never excuse yourself to yourself. Never pity yourself. Be a hard master to yourself, but lenient to everybody else.

6. Concentrate your force on your own proper business; do not turn off. Be constant, steadfast, persevering.

7. The art of making one's fortune is to spend nothing. In this country any intelligent and industrious young man may become rich if he stops all leaks, and is not in a hurry. Do not make haste; be patient.

8. Do not speculate or gamble. You go to a land where everybody is excited, and strives to make money, suddenly, largely, and without working for it. They blow soap bubbles. Steady, patient industry is both the surest and the safest way. Greediness and haste are two devils that destroy thousands every year.

9. I beseech you to correct one fault—severe speech of others. Never speak evil of any man, no matter what the facts may be. Hasty fault-finding and severe speech of absent people is not honorable, is apt to be unjust and cruel, makes enemies for yourself, and is wicked.

10. You must remember that you go to Mr. B—— not to learn to manage a farm like his. One or two hundred acres, not forty thousand, is to be your future homestead; but you can learn the care of cattle, sheep, the culture of wheat, the climate, country, manners and customs, and a hundred things that will be needful.

11. If by integrity, industry, and well-earned success, you deserve well of your fellow citizens, they may in years to come ask you to accept honors. Do not seek them, do not receive them while you are young—wait; but when you are

established, you may make your father's name known with honor in halls of legislation.

Lastly, do not forget your father's and your mother's God. Because you will be largely deprived of church privileges, you need all the nerve to keep your heart before God. But do not despise small churches and humble preachers. "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate."

Read often the Proverbs, and the precepts and duties enjoined in the New Testament. May your father's God be with you and protect you!

## MEASURING CRIMINALS IN FRANCE.

In former times in France, policemen, detectives, and prison warders received five francs for each old offender whom they recognized; it was a struggle of artifice against artifice, but more than three-quarters of the hardened criminals succeeded in outwitting their opponents. This is no longer possible, because, while a man can change his name and disguise his features to a certain extent, he cannot alter the measurement of determinate parts of his body. It is by this latter means that old offenders are discovered. Each individual who is taken to the police station is at once sent upstairs to the top floor of the conciergerie to be measured. Three employees are detailed for this operation, which consists in taking certain lengths of the human frame, together with those of the span, the trunk of the body, the right ear and the mention of the color of the eyes and hair, the supposed age, and the description of any particular marks or scars upon the body. The measurements selected are those that science has indicated as being the least changing from one period of life to another. The first measurement is the height. The prisoner, barefooted, is placed against the wall and measured in the usual way, only a little more accurately.

The second measurement is the maximum length of the arms, or the span. This measurement is popularly supposed to be always equal to the height, but it frequently varies several centimeters one way or the other. It helps, therefore, in classifying after the height.

The third measurement is the trunk of the body. This measurement, as well as that of the span, serves rather for the physical description of the subject than for the classification of his card.

The fourth measurement is the length of the head. The prisoner being seated upon a stool, one point of a compass is placed in the hallow above the bridge of the nose, while the other point is used to find out the greatest length of the back of the head. By means of a screw the opening of the compass is fixed at that length, and as a check the operation of measuring is begun again. The instrument is so accurate that should a mistake of only one millimeter too little have been made on the first measurement, the points will not pass; if, on the contrary, the compass has been opened one millimeter too much, the points will not touch the skin of the head. It will be seen, therefore, extraordinary though it may appear, that without the slightest difficulty the head can be measured to within one millimeter. The fifth measurement is the maximum breadth of the head, and is obtained by measuring from one parietal bone to the other in the same manner as the length of the head is taken.

The sixth measurement taken is that of the right ear, which is one of the most important factors in the identification of criminals. It is almost impossible to meet with two ears that are identical in all parts.

The seventh measurement is the maximum length of the left foot. To avoid any cheating, the prisoner is made to stand, barefooted, on the left foot only, with the left knees bent.

The eighth measurement, the length of the middle finger of the left hand, is one of the best of the indications, for it can be taken to within a millimeter, provided care is used so that the finger be bent at an exact right angle with the back of the hand; there can be no cheating with this, as it undergoes no alteration from adult to old age. The nail must be pared if it is unsually long.

The ninth measurement is the length of the left forearm. The subject places his arm in a sliding measure resting upon a trestle, the hand open.

All these measurements, together with the mention of the color of the eyes, hair, etc., are recorded upon a card, upon which are pasted two photographs, one exactly full face and the other exactly right profile. The next step is to find out whether all these measurements do not apply to some old jailbird who has been measured previously under another name. At the same time Doctor Bertillon devised this anthropometric method, he also imagined a system of classification of the identification cards, which is as important as the measurement itself; for, with the description of the criminals, if you cannot put your hand on the cards at once, they are practically useless, as the accumulated photographs were before the introduction of the anthopometric method. Thanks to Doctor Bertillon's novel classification system, the card is found in a few minutes.

## STAGE FRIGHT.

A manager says: "I once sent 'on' a young medical student in the character of a lover, who had to make a declaration, be accepted, be surprised by a rival, challenge him on the spot, declare that he would not stir until this green sward was stained with the blood of one if not both, order parenthetically pistols for two at once, and coffee for one in ten minutes, and, in fact, go through the greatest amount of bombast compressible into a short time. Of course, the love-making was to be of the most high-flown character. "'On' he went, and at sight of the audience and the lady seated at her worktable subsided immediately into the very abyss of fear. Instead of rushing frantically toward the object of his affections, flinging himself on his knees, and bursting into a tremendous rhapsody, as he ought to have done, he simply stood and looked at her, twisting his hat feebly in his hands.

"Not one word could he say, but in dead silence crept across the stage, slowly took up a chair, offered to sit down, looked behind him to make sure if the chair was really in its place, sat down on the extreme edge of it, looked on the ground, rubbed his knees slowly, and now and then glanced up at his intended bride, much as a dog looks up when it has stolen something and knows it is going to be whipped. The audience were in ecstacies. They all thought it was pure acting, and that the part was that of a bashful lover. Certainly, any one who could act half as well would make his fortune. He had been in possession of the stage some seven or eight minutes without speaking a word, when he opened his mouth once or twice, rubbed his knees again, and at length, said, in a broken and husky voice: 'How's your mother?' A perfect shriek of laughter burst from the audience, and gave the opportunity for getting him off the stage. The rival rushed forward, pounced on him, hauled him off by the collar, flung himself on his knees, did all the rhapsody himself, and we had to patch up the scene as best we could. Although so complete a failure on the part of the individual, the scene was the best of the evening."

## TO PRESERVE PATENT LEATHER.

To preserve the gloss of patent leather, the following preparation should be used: Melt an ounce of pure wax over a water bath—a contrivance easily made by placing one tin cup inside of another, the outside one containing water, and the substance to be melted placed in the inner one. Then add half a gill of olive oil and quarter of an ounce of lard, and mix intimately by stirring. To this add a few drops of oil of turpentine, and finally ten or twelve drops of oil of lavender. Pour the mixture into a box, and allow it to congeal. Apply a little of it to the shoe or boot, and rub with a linen rag, which will restore the gloss to the leather, keeping it soft, and preventing cracking.

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